

# **G.I. GURDJIEFF**

## **KEY CONCEPTS OF THE WORK**





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## THE WAY OR PATH

*'The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.'*

Lao Tzu

### Ancient Teaching of Inner Development

Throughout human history, in virtually every culture and epoch, there are indications of the presence of a primal universal teaching of inner development and self-realization. Sometimes referred to as the Way, Path, Teaching or Tradition, this spiritual impulse has manifested culturally in different forms and expressions as the esoteric heart of the great religious traditions of the world such as Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Yet it also exists independent of these traditions through forms that are not immediately recognized as religious or spiritual.

This universal spiritual teaching is timeless and is said to have originated from the source of Life itself: "This essential Wisdom has always existed among humanity, and continues to exist." The origins of this 'Great Teaching' are shrouded in mystery and have never been traced or dated: "The Path is not time-bound, having been represented among humanity from the very earliest times." However, the custodians and exponents of this Teaching emphasize that speculations regarding origin and history are of secondary importance, compared to its perennial existence and function as a spiritual nutrient for humanity.

At its heart the Teaching is essentially indefinable and beyond verbalization -- 'Truth without form' -- and cannot be understood by systematic analysis or "imprisoned in perennial, static categories of thought." This is because it is difficult to clearly define something which must be experienced by each person according to their level of understanding and spiritual development. The Teaching is organic in nature and exists at different levels and dimensions. It is sometimes referred to as an art, a science, a journey, a conscious evolution.

Gurdjieff and others have spoken of a 'secret tradition' of wisdom composed of an unbroken line of initiates or an 'inner circle of humanity' who are custodians of an ancient knowledge of human spiritual development:

Gurdjieff suggested the idea of some hidden influence that linked all the generations of men in a way ordinarily unsuspected . . . As a youth, Gurdjieff became obsessed with the idea that there was a purpose and aim behind human life which was hardly ever glimpsed in the ceaseless generations of man. He became convinced that in former epochs man had possessed genuine knowledge of such matters, and that this knowledge was still preserved, somehow, somewhere. (1)

Gurdjieff is widely believed to have contacted such a source of ancient esoteric teaching during his travels in Central Asia. He alluded to this possibility in his description of the ‘Sarmoung Brotherhood’ in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. The Naqshbandi Sufis also speak of an ancient ‘hidden knowledge’ passed down by initiation and preserved by a chain of succession. They are said to be the guardians of a ‘special training system’ of advanced spiritual teachings which represent a direct path to inner development:

The word Naqshbandi is made of two words. *Naqsh* is painting and *bandi* are the people who do the painting. You could therefore say that Naqshbandi means the *painters* or the *designers* . . . It is also known in the Tradition as the mother-order, as well as *Kwajagan*, which means the *guardians of the Tradition* throughout history . . . For us, there is only one total truth, and that is God. (2)

The purpose of the Teaching is to guide aspirants to enlightenment and human completion by discovering “the river of knowledge from beyond the stars.” A variety of metaphors, analogies and parallels have been employed to describe the nature and process of this inner spiritual development:

- The existence of a certain potentiality or ‘nobility of mind’ residing within every human being, leading to an objective understanding of one’s spiritual destiny and place in life
- The discovery of a ‘treasure’ within the innermost consciousness of humankind. “When there is a light in the house of life, multiplicity is seen as unity and perfection” (Rumi)
- The process of ‘shepherding’ the raw, embryonic human consciousness, allowing a fuller perception and realization of inherent spiritual possibilities
- Unveiling the ‘essence’ or real part of oneself which speaks when other elements are silent. “There is a more objective reality than usually imagined; it is when this transcendental knowledge has been gained that the nature of human life is understood”
- The alchemical process of self-work and inner transformation leading to human completion and self-realization: ‘*Wool through the presence of conscious knowledge becomes a carpet*’
- The regeneration of the human essence and integration with the higher Self by means of the ‘Philosopher’s Stone’ which “purifies the dross to create the gold”
- The ‘refinement’ and ‘purification’ of the human soul and unification with the Godhead: ultimate Truth and Reality

## **Universal Timeless Nature**

There is an inner need and aspiration for spiritual understanding and development in virtually every human being, although it may be unrecognized, given different names or understood in different ways. The basis for the spiritual experience is inherent in the human mind and is a natural development and common possession of humanity: “The essential truth lies within one’s inner consciousness.”

The living truth is alive at the core of each of the world’s religious and spiritual traditions. The ‘way of liberation’ is not the unique property of any one religion or spiritual teaching. At the heart and depth of each tradition there is a transcendental unity:

Q: It seems that many people these days change traditions in the hope of finding truth.

A: It is a lack of insight to change one traditional frame for another. When you go deeply into your own religious tradition you will find the transcendental unity of all religions, the unity of the non-experience, the living understanding. Here there is no quarrel over dogma, ritual and mystical states, nor any place for comparison. It is true that many of the traditional religions have become so identified with secondary factors that they give more hindrance than help in understanding. But if you inquire deeply as a Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, Hindu, and you understand it very profoundly, you will come to the living truth. There are sages and saints in all religious traditions. (3)

The source of higher knowledge, or the ‘mystical stream,’ is essentially one and exists in every culture and epoch. In the words of the Sufi adept Halki: “Numberless waves, lapping and momentarily reflecting the sun – all from the same sea.” Although spiritual knowledge is one unified whole, the primary Teaching is inevitably split into myriad threads, facets and expressions of the same underlying truth: “All authentic expressions of human spiritual aspiration may be seen as having a single source, and that the differences are in appearance only, imposed by cultural and local conditions.”

The essence of spirituality is neither of the East nor the West and transcends culture, geography and time period. Zen poets have expressed this eloquently: “The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike, and awakening is the birthright of all human beings” and “On whose door does the moonlight not shine?”

The spiritual experience of union with the Divine occurs among the mystics of every religion and spiritual tradition, but may be expressed in a different language or terminology:

Can one distill from religious or mystical experience certain pure elements which are common everywhere in all religions? If a Christian mystic has an

experience which can be phenomenologically compared with a Zen experience, does it matter that the Christian in fact believes that he is personally with God and the Zen-man interprets his experience as *Sunyata* or the void being aware of itself? . . . All religions thus “meet at the top,” and their various theologies and philosophies become irrelevant when we see that they were merely means for arriving at the same end, and all means are alike efficacious. (4)

There is something pure and true at the heart of all the world’s religions and spiritual traditions which transcend their external forms and expressions. Each offers a particular path with the same ultimate goal. There is no monopoly or exclusivity in ultimate Truth as all spiritual teachings originate from the same perennial stream and root source: “There are as many ways to God as souls of human beings.”

When viewed from the outside religious traditions seem completely different, yet at their root and in their deepest spirit there is no difference. Fundamentally all religions are one in terms of life and spirit: “Each religion is nothing but a path, a way to reach the summit. You can reach the summit from many directions.” In a sense all religions are the outer face of an inner truth: “Different religions are external shapes within which eternal truths have been articulated to meet the spiritual needs of specific cultures and communities.” Within these outer forms there is a deeper, universal truth – the inner ‘kernel’ or heart of religion.

Within every religion there are different levels of teaching, each appropriate in its own way to those at a certain stage of spiritual development:

The different teachings of the various religions are all beneficial and necessary for people at different capacities and perspectives. Some of these teachings may be of an “expedient” or “persuasive” nature, devised for the immature minds of the masses; others are truly the final teachings, only suitable, at our present stage of evolution, for a minority of highly endowed persons. But all religions have played their constructive roles in promoting human welfare and spiritual growth. As a Buddhist sees it, in the big family of divine doctrines there is a distinction only between the preliminary and the advanced, between the “expedient” and the final teachings, but *not* between the “right” and the “wrong” ones. (5)

Most religions contain both an outer (exoteric) teaching and an inner (esoteric) teaching which points directly to spiritual truth. In metaphorical terms, the esoteric component is the root of a tree while the exoteric component represents the branches of the tree:

In any religious teaching there is an exoteric part, the traditional, and an esoteric part, the Tradition. The exoteric part is very conventional and is not really the essence of the teaching. The essence of the teaching is esoteric. The interpretation on the esoteric level of every tradition, Judaism, Christianity, Taoism, and so on, is the only truth. There are not several truths, there is only truth. Truth can never be objectified, can never be perceived. You can only be it. Truth can only be trans-

mitted through truth. Transmutation can only take place through our real nature, which knows itself by itself, and doesn't need an agent. (6)

The exoteric aspect of a traditional religion is formulated for the needs of a particular community at a given time and circumstance, while the esoteric heart of the religion is universal in nature:

People today keep certain traditional formulations which were formulated hundreds and thousands of years ago. The formulation of this tradition was according to the understanding, the level of the society at the time. This formulation of a tradition is the doctrine. It belongs to the traditional aspect. *Tradition*, as I see it, means that which is truth, that which is transmitted. That means the truth transmits the truth. You can never transmit the doctrine. The doctrine is formulated every twenty or fifty years. You could even say the doctrine appears from moment to moment. So *tradition* means what is transmitted. The truth is transmitted. Ideas, doctrine can never bring transmutation. (7)

## Transmission of the Teaching

There has always been a continuous, altruistic stream of guardianship of the 'Great Teaching' based on capacity, purity of intention and level of spiritual development. "Human refinement is the goal, and the inner teachings of all the faiths aim at this. In order to accomplish it, there is always a tradition handed down by a living chain of adepts, who select suitable candidates to whom to impart this knowledge."

In some esoteric teachings, such as Sufism, it is claimed that the Teaching or Tradition dates from Adam himself: "The seed of Truth was sown in the time of Adam, germinated in the time of Noah, budded in the time of Abraham, began to develop in the time of Moses, reached maturity in the time of Jesus and produced pure wine in the time of Mohammed."

A number of specific historical lines of transmission have been identified which may not be entirely independent or exclusive:

- An immemorial tradition of wisdom has existed from the earliest beginnings of human life on earth.
- The 'Great Teaching' predates and has survived the 'Flood' or some other unspecified planetary disaster.
- The ancient doctrines of the Egyptian and Chaldean masters, as well as Zoroaster and Hermes, are in direct line with the Teaching.
- The Teaching was known to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Joseph and Jesus.
- It was known to and practised by a succession of Greek sages, including Socrates, Plato, Hippocrates and Pythagoras.

- The ancient Vedic teachings of India are congruent with the Teaching.
- The teachings of the Buddha and the early Taoist and Zen masters were authentic explications of the same Path.

The Way is the product of conscious study, investigation and experience over a period of countless millennia. Throughout history specialists have guarded this ‘sacred science’ of higher knowledge and practice and ensured its preservation and dissemination. The fundamental insights and methodologies are intact, comprehensive and effective: “Such room as there is for experimentation and ‘re-inventing the wheel’ is limited and limiting.”

The Tradition is an established path of inner development with a prescribed method under the guidance of teachers who have already completed the journey. Teachers of the Way are individuals who have reached the state of self-realization and enlightenment and are thus able to navigate the Path, leading others to the ultimate destination of human fulfilment and spiritual maturity. However, it is also acknowledged that an individual may be able to achieve enlightenment on their own (although such instances are rare) without the support of the Teaching.

A lineage is usually defined as an unbroken line or chain of teachers and their successors which ensures the validity and continuity of a spiritual teaching through the generations. In the deepest sense a lineage is a tradition of ‘truth-seekers’ united by a direct perception of the reality of timeless being and presence, without a primary reference to the past: “The way of approaching truth belongs to a certain current, but there are no entities in a line.”

The direct transmission of a spiritual teaching is qualitatively different from the dissemination of ideas, practices and other external forms: “One doesn’t transmit doctrines hundreds of years old, but the actual present essence of the tradition. One must live the essence in order to be able to formulate it in present language, and so transmit it.”

We might say that tradition is the transmission of Life. It is the essential, living experience of the fundamental non-state. Direct transmission needs no support. It is not bound by memory, time and space. All that is not direct transmission takes place in time and space. It involves memory. This we call ‘traditional’ and it includes rituals, doctrines, beliefs, myths, and so on. These ways of expression and teaching vary according to the individual culture and century. As long as the ‘tradition’ is directly grounded in tradition it is a vehicle for transmission. In other words the timeless background must remain in all its expressions. When this is so, the traditional remains flexible, appropriate and timely. But when the anecdotal, the ‘traditional,’ is emphasized, it loses its source in direct transmission and becomes inflexible. It cannot function for it has lost its original orientation, its true *raison d'être*, its life force. It becomes a shell without the animal in it. (8)

In the Zen tradition the sharing of the Buddha's spiritual insights and teachings is expressed in these terms:

A special transmission outside the Scriptures;  
No dependence upon words and letters;  
Direct pointing to the essence of one's being;  
Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of Buddhahood. (9)

Buddha himself denied that he had founded a religion: "He likened himself to one who had discovered an ancient road leading to an ancient city. The road and city were abandoned and overgrown by jungle, but the traces remained; leading others to the same discovery." The indirect way in which the Buddha's teaching was transmitted from master to disciple is illustrated by a classic story:

One day Buddha was standing in front of the assembly at Vautours Mountain. Everyone was waiting for the daily lesson, but he remained silent. After some time, he lifted his right hand which held a flower, all the while looking at the assembly without saying a single word. Each looked at him without understanding at all. Only one monk looked at Buddha with sparkling eyes and smiled . . . The monk who smiled was Kasyapa, a great disciple of Buddha. Kasyapa reached the Moment of awakening when Buddha raised his flower. At the same time he received the "mind seal" of Buddha, to use the Zen terminology. Buddha had transmitted his Wisdom from mind to mind; he had taken the seal of his mind and had imprinted it on the mind of Kasyapa. (10)

This story illustrates the subtle nature of spiritual transmission and the fact that the essence of an authentic transmission is a mutual recognition of awakened minds:

In one sense there is no transmission of any direct knowledge or understanding from one person to another, because the teaching is reality itself and the direct knowledge and understanding of suchness must be firsthand. In another sense there is transmission, in that conscious participation in reality is not a subjective experience, but is by nature shared in common with anyone who has the same objective experience. Kasyapa was already enlightened when he met the Buddha, he recognized the Buddha's enlightenment, and Buddha recognized his enlightenment. (11)

Traditionally a spiritual teacher transmits a certain beneficial energy or grace (*Baraka*) to their students, much like a chord or vibration which harmonizes with their inner being. This may occur through "a look, a touch or gesture, or a word, sometimes a vivid dream or a strong remembrance. Sometimes the only sign of grace is a significant and rapid change in character and behaviour."

The living reality is beyond words and thought but can be passed from one person to another by mind-to-mind transmission based on mutual affinity and comprehension. What is important in spiritual transmission is the inner dynamic and essential understanding of the teacher, not the outer manifestations and secondary phenomena surrounding him or her:

In a word, what constituted the life and spirit of Buddhism is nothing else than the inner life and spirit of the Buddha himself; Buddhism is the structure erected around the inmost consciousness of its founder. The style and material of the outer structure may vary as history moves forward, but the inner meaning of Buddhahood which supports the whole edifice remains the same and ever living. While on earth the Buddha tried to make it intelligible in accordance with the capacities of his immediate followers; that is to say, the latter did their best to comprehend the deeper significance of the various discourses of their master, in which he pointed the way to final deliverance. As we are told, the Buddha discoursed ‘with one voice,’ but this was interpreted and understood by his devotees in as manifold manner as possible. This was inevitable, for we have each our own inner experience which is to be explained in terms of our own creation, naturally varying in depth and breadth. (12)

There is a mutual relationship between teacher and student in the transmission of a spiritual teaching: “Receiving it, the person is sanctioned to teach; giving it, the person passes on authority.” Ultimately the student must reach his or her own deep insight and understanding of spiritual truth and not “walk in the shadow of their teacher.”

### **Nature of the Path**

The Teaching is an ‘organic whole’ and specialized science with its own postulates, laws and learning methods resulting from the discovery of universal spiritual principles and their significance for humanity. “It is not based on dogma but on objective knowledge resulting from the application of certain spiritual laws of nature that are adapted to the specific needs of each time and place, application of which requires direct observation, the renewed analysis of the circumstances and practical verification.”

The operation of the Teaching is a skilled and complex undertaking or ‘technology’ requiring a sense of measure, correct application of developmental impacts and a sensitivity to the requirements of ‘time, place and people.’ In many cases the Tradition has no outward “spiritual” cloak or aspect, enabling it to operate more effectively in the world without overt resistance or conditioned preconceptions.

The Teaching is organized and projected in a manner which is practical and useful in order to produce its full spiritual effect upon a human being, group or community. “It is not a magic way or an accelerated progress. It is hard and a lifelong work, but at every stage one is provided

with the instruments and the knowledge of how to use it.” Like any specialized field of study the Way has a comprehensive body of knowledge, trained and skilled teachers and its own methods, procedures and experiential exercises. This Teaching is based on a precise knowledge of which tools, ideas and techniques are truly useful in a given circumstance. Omar Ali-Shah: “In the Tradition we are following a technically exact and disciplined activity. Everything we do, everything we use, our music, our recitations, our colour combinations, are technical instruments within the overall context of the Tradition.”

The attainment of higher levels of spiritual development comes through the confluence of knowledge, capacity, effort and method. The foundation of this consciously directed process of inner growth is based on right design and measure: “The design is perceived by those who have the experience to know it, the measure is the consequence of this perception.” In other words, knowledge of the end creates the means:

The Teaching, for its part, is carried out – and is able to cross ideological boundaries – because of a knowledge of the objective: an objective which is at worst postulated as an assumption that it exists; at best glimpsed; and thenceforward is the subject of repeated attempts to devise a means to recover this glimpse. The working hypothesis or traditional framework provides the structure by which the would-be illuminate attempts to approach this goal. In the case of the School, knowledge alone provides the basis upon which the structure can be devised. ‘Once you know the end, you can devise the means.’ The end does not justify the means – it provides it. The means, employed in this sense, is the structure referred to in some literature as ‘The Work.’ (13)

The purpose of the Teaching is to furnish “spiritual nourishment” which leads to a true understanding and realization of one’s essential nature and place in the universe. This extended perception or ‘conscious evolution’ provides an “extra-dimensional view of the origin, possibilities and place of humanity in the larger picture and one’s relationship with the Supreme Being.”

Spiritual understanding can be cultivated and provoked in others when the conditions are ripe and “the desire for truth is accompanied by the means for attaining it.” The experiential nature of the enlightened state is encapsulated in the saying ‘*to taste is to know.*’

A variety of methods may be employed to reach the same goal. “Out of wheat many types of food are prepared, using different methods. In the same way, there are many systems of spirituality.” The various methods are ‘skilful means’ designed to lead the aspirant to a fuller, higher understanding of the meaning and purpose of life. Each approach inevitably leads to the same ultimate goal – direct perception of one’s real nature:

Many kinds of food are needed to make the child grow, but the act of eating is the same. Theoretically, all approaches are good. In practice, and at a given moment, you proceed by one road only. Sooner or later you are bound to dis-

cover that if you really want to find, you must dig at one place only – within.

Q: Surely there is something valid and valuable in every approach?

A: In each case the value lies in bringing you to the need of seeking within. Playing with various approaches may be due to resistance to going within, to the fear of having to abandon the illusion of being something or somebody in particular. To find water you do not dig small pits all over the place, but drill deep in one place only. Similarly, to find your Self you have to explore yourself. (14)

Different paths suit different natures with different modes of evolution. In order to make the Teaching practical and effective it may have to be formulated in many different ways and approached from different levels. Ramana Maharshi: “I approve of all schools. The same truth has to be expressed in different ways to suit the capacity of the hearer.”

Q: Different teachers have set up different schools and proclaimed different truths and so confused people. Why?

A: They have all taught the same truth but from different standpoints. Such differences were necessary to meet the needs of different minds differently constituted, but they all reveal the same Truth.

Q: Since they have recommended different paths which is the one to follow?

A: You speak of paths as if you were somewhere and the Self somewhere else and you had to go and reach it. But in fact the Self is here and now and you are that always. (15)

The Path is dynamic, creative and organic, adapting itself to each place and time. “It is always fresh, as a spring leaping out of the ground.” Because the Teaching is essentially formless it can only be organized to a certain extent. In the words of D.T. Suzuki: “Anything organic and spiritual has no geometrical outline which can be traced on paper by ruler and compass. It refuses to be objectively defined, for this will be setting a limit to the growth of its spirit.”

There is a natural ebb and flow, of ups and downs, in the spiritual journey. Sometimes periods of withdrawal and contemplation are alternated with complete immersion and involvement in the experiences of life. “Does it matter whether you pull the cart or push it, as long as it is kept rolling.”

Q: How does one go beyond the mind?

A: There are many starting points – they all lead to the same goal. You may begin with selfless work, abandoning the fruits of action; you may then give up

thinking and end in giving up all desires. Here, giving up is the operational factor. Or, you may not bother about anything you want, or think, or do and just stay put in the thought and feeling ‘I am,’ focusing ‘I am’ firmly in your mind. All kinds of experiences may come to you – remain unmoved in the knowledge that all that is perceivable is transient, and only the ‘I am’ endures.

Q: I cannot give all my life to such practices. I have my duties to attend to.

A: By all means attend to your duties. Action, in which you are not emotionally involved and which is beneficial and does not cause suffering will not bind you. You may be engaged in several directions and work with enormous zest, yet remain inwardly free and quiet, with a mirror-like mind, which reflects all, without being affected. (16)

Because different spiritual methods apply to people at different levels of development and potentiality, preliminary practices are sometimes necessary to prepare the aspirant for the stage of formless awareness and direct insight. Jean Klein: “The words, the activities, are a crutch and this support gradually loses its concreteness . . . The formulations are symbols, pointers, and ultimately you do not see the symbol but that to which it points.”

Certain spiritual methods are for purification and elimination of the obstacles preventing self-realization. “These spiritual practices are not for knowing one’s own Self, which is all-pervading, but only for getting rid of the objects of desire and attachment. When all these are discarded, one remains as one IS. That which is always in existence is the Self – all things are born out of the Self.”

In some traditional teachings two primary approaches to liberation are recommended: the path of knowledge or the path of devotion. The first is based on inquiry into the nature of the self and the second on unconditional surrender to God or a Higher Power. The path of knowledge removes the sense of a personal “I” while the path of devotion removes the sense of “mine.” Ramana Maharshi clarified the path of devotion which is often misunderstood by the Western mind: “Surrender can never be regarded as complete as long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is love of God for the sake of love and nothing else.”

These two traditional approaches to spiritual understanding appeal to different natures and temperaments:

Generally speaking there are two ways: external and internal. Either you live with somebody who knows the Truth and submit yourself entirely to his guiding and molding influence, or you seek the inner guide and follow the inner light wherever it takes you. In both cases your personal desires and fears must be disregarded. You learn either by proximity or by investigation, the passive or the active way. You either let yourself be carried by the river of life and love represented by your Guru, or you make your own efforts, guided by your inner

star. In both cases you must move on, you must be earnest. Rare are the people who are lucky to find somebody worthy of trust and love. Most of them must take the hard way, the way of intelligence and understanding, of discrimination and detachment. This is the way open to all. (17)

## The Direct Way

The direct way or path is considered the culmination of the spiritual search and is sometimes called the ‘royal path.’ It is centered on and stabilized in the final destination and supersedes all other spiritual paths which are based on a progressive, time-bound approach to spiritual development and realization. The direct path is always available and can be lived in every moment of life:

There is such a way, open to all, on every level, in every walk of life. Everybody is aware of himself. The deepening and broadening of self-awareness is the royal way. Call it mindfulness, or witnessing, or just attention – it is for all. No one is unripe for it and none can fail. But, of course, you must not be merely alert. Your mindfulness must include the mind also. Witnessing is primarily awareness of consciousness and its movements. (18)

This way is more subtle than gradual paths of inner development: “The reality of direct perception cannot actually be described, for it can only be known to the perceiver. There is no fixed way or path, for any means can become an end in the hands of the unenlightened.” The simple, yet mysterious nature of the direct path is captured in a classic exchange between a Zen master and his disciple:

When Joshu was with Nansen, he asked, “What is the Way?”

Nansen: “Your everyday mind – this is the Way.”

Joshu: “Do we need any special conducting or not?”

Nansen replied: “No. When we turn towards it, we turn away from it.”

“But if we do not need any special conducting, how do we find the Way?”

Nansen: “The Way transcends both knowledge and no-knowledge. Knowledge is illusion, no-knowledge is indifference. When you really arrive at the point where not a shadow of doubt is possible, it is like vastness of space, empty and infinitely expanding. You have no way to either affirm or to negate.”

This is said to have led Joshu to a spiritual awakening. (19)

The direct path points to our natural state of pure awareness and being which transcends the mind and body, while the progressive approach seeks to gradually eliminate the obstacles and impediments to self-realization. “Living is to be found in the timeless *now*. So don’t accumulate more things, learn new ways to meditate or relax or purify. All this accumulation of states and sensations and techniques is nothing but vanity.”

There are basically two known approaches to truth, the gradual and the direct. In the direct approach the premise is that you *are* the truth, there is nothing to achieve. Every step to achieve something is going away from it. The “path,” which strictly speaking is not a path from somewhere to somewhere, is only to welcome, to be open to the truth, the I am. When you have once glimpsed your real nature it solicits you. There is therefore nothing to do, only to be attuned to it as often as invited. There is not a single element of volition in this attuning. It is not the mind which attunes to the I am but the I am which absorbs the mind. In the gradual approach you are bound to the mind. The mind is under the illusion that if it changes, alters states, stops, etc., it will be absorbed in what is beyond it. This misconception leads to a state in which a truth-seeker has bound himself in his own web, a web of the most subtle duality. (20)

The progressive way is a path of purification and elimination which proceeds in stages and is characterized by certain experiences. But in all experiences one remains in a subject-object relationship which is “an expression of life but is not life itself.”

Q: Why do you say that the path of stages or different levels keeps you in the subject-object relationship?

A: Progression can only be known through experience, comparison and interpretation, in other words, through memory. There must be a centre of reference, otherwise, how could you talk of stages? All levels belong to the mind. But what you already and constantly are is not a level, nor a state, nor an experience. These are impermanent and have a beginning and an end, but your real nature is causeless and timeless. How then can you reach the non-state through a series of states? These states may bring you delightful experiences, it is true, but they are sugar for the I-image, nothing else. Stages are a creation of the ego to keep it alive in a more and more subtle way. Although they bring about a certain purification and elimination, they can never bring you a hair’s breadth nearer to the non-state. (21)

In some instances, proponents of the direct path may use elements and methods drawn from a progressive teaching, such as body-work or sitting meditation, as a support or aid: “We live in space and time. Although the axis shifts in one moment it takes time for past habits to fall away.”

Q: Does meditation differ in the two ways?

A: Absolutely. In the progressive approach meditation is a discipline to still the mind and bring it to an absence of thought. But the mind can never be permanently still. To associate no-thought with silence is false identification. Silence is beyond the presence and absence of thought . . . In the direct way sitting meditation is used only as a laboratory to watch how your mechanism functions. You give no hold to what you watch so that from the beginning the emphasis is

on listening and watching. At other times the word ‘meditation’ refers to your background, the stillness or presence in which all appears spontaneously. (22)

Although the elimination of past conditioning is one of the goals of the progressive path, there is a subtle sense of end-gaining in which the ego is still engaged when pursuing a path based on stages of development and attainment of a projected end or destination. “All practice and technique belongs to the egoic mind as the intellect loses its natural sensitivity and flexibility because it is put into a frame.” The desire to change and develop spiritually may be an escape to prevent one from confronting the reality of the ego’s subjective power and desire to maintain itself:

Begin by questioning your desire to change. Your practices are only an escape from facing the first question. Through discipline you may alter the position of all the objects on your table but that is superficial change. Real transmutation comes when you tip the table over and all the objects slide off! See that you are constantly escaping from facing your ego head on. The mind is sly and seduces you down many roads rather than release its control on you. When you see something clearly the pattern loses its power. No amount of striving can bring you to clear seeing. When you see your mechanism clearly the energy, the axis, of your being immediately shifts and transformation occurs. (23)

From the perspective of the direct way the gradual or progressive path is driven by a number of unexamined assumptions which are ultimately spiritually unproductive. These include end-gaining, striving, anticipation, accumulation and achievement, qualities of mind which involve “turning round and round in circles within the same old structure” and “attempting to come to that which is timeless by working through time.” In contrast the direct path asserts that “there is nothing to attain since what we are looking for, we already are” and “in projecting a goal you can only go away from your real nature, what you are now.”

The great Indian sage Ramana Maharshi taught the direct path through self-inquiry by enjoining his followers to question “Who am I?” When asked what his method was he replied: “There is nothing to be reached. You are always as you really are, but you don’t realize it. That is all.”

Reality is simply the loss of the ego. Destroy the ego by seeking its identity. Because the ego is no entity it will automatically vanish and Reality will shine forth by itself. This is the direct method. Whereas all other methods are done only by retaining the ego. In those paths there arise so many doubts and the eternal question remains to be tackled finally. But in this method the final question is the only one and it is raised from the very beginning. No *sadhanas* are necessary for engaging in this quest. There is no greater mystery than this: ourselves being the Reality we seek to gain reality. We think that there is something hiding our Reality and that it must be destroyed before the Reality is gained. It is ridiculous. A day will dawn when you will yourself laugh at your

past efforts. That which will be on the day you laugh is also here and now. We are actually experiencing the Reality only; still we do not know it. Is it not a wonder of wonders? (24)

Ramana Maharshi sometimes used analogies to describe the direct path of self-inquiry: "There are a number of rivers; some flow straight, some wind and twist zig-zag, but all of them ultimately become merged in the ocean. In the same way, all paths become merged in the path of self-enquiry, just as all languages become merged in Silence."

Q: Why should Self-enquiry alone be considered the direct path to Realization?

A: Because every kind of path except Self-enquiry presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for following it, and cannot be followed without the mind. The ego may take different and more subtle forms at different stages of one's practice but it is never destroyed. The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind by methods other than Self-enquiry is like a thief turning policeman to catch the thief that is himself. Self-enquiry alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists and enable one to realize the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute. (25)

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj also taught the path of self-inquiry, stressing that the practice of mindfulness or 'witnessing' opens the door to self-inquiry:

Q: We were told that of all forms of spiritual practice the practice of the attitude of a mere witness is the most efficacious. How does it compare with faith?

A: The witness attitude is also faith; it is faith in oneself. You believe that you are not what you experience and you look at everything as from a distance. There is no effort in witnessing. You understand that you are the witness only and the understanding acts. You need nothing more, just remember that you are the witness only. If in the state of witnessing you ask yourself: 'Who am I?', the answer comes at once, though it is wordless and silent. Cease to be the object and become the subject of all that happens; once having turned within, you will find yourself beyond the subject. When you have found yourself, you will find that you are also beyond the object, that both the subject and object exist in you, but you are neither. (26)

The direct path addresses the fundamental problem – our mistaken identification with the body and mind – and points our attention to the experience of reality as it is, the Self. Jean Klein: "The starting point of the direct path is the deliberate rejection of the subject-object duality which is the framework of all our usual activities (metaphysical speculation included). Travelling along this path is an entirely upstream journey implying the complete rejection of our usual mental activities, even in their highest form." The direct path is guided by the sword of

discrimination which is grounded in the non-dual background of ultimate reality lying behind the world of concepts and appearances. “From the beginning the mind knows that it is limited and lives in welcoming a new dimension. The intellect has not been conditioned and its fluidity is vitally important for this last discernment.”

The basic tenet of the direct way is that we are not the body, the senses or the mind, but the light beyond all perceptions: “Your global non-state is already there. It is natural to you, and it ‘waits’ for the deep relaxation of the habits of body and mind.” In the direct teaching one faces the Ultimate Reality immediately and views the body, senses and mind through the prism of the Ultimate. Purification moves from above to below.

A teacher of the direct path points to ultimate truth through his or her own experience and realization. In the words of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: “I trusted my teacher’s words and kept them in my mind and I found that he was right: that I was, am and shall always be the infinite Reality, embracing all, transcending all.”

The aspirant is encouraged to experience the essence of life itself, to see life as it really is in all its naked glory. This direct path to spiritual truth is centered, writes Thomas Merton, “in the pure unarticulated and unexplained ground of direct experience. The direct experience of what? Life itself. What it means that I exist, that I live: who is this ‘I’ that exists and lives?” The direct path leads to a clear perception and understanding of the bare facts of truth:

On the level of the mind, ordinary understanding, the nearest we can come to objectless truth is a clear perspective, a vision of the objectless. I often call this a geometrical representation. The contents of this representation are what could be called the facts of truth: that the mind has limits; that truth is beyond the mind; that truth, our real nature, cannot be objectified, just as the eye cannot see itself seeing; that truth, consciousness, was never born and will never die; that it is the light in which all happenings, all objects appear and disappear; that in order for there to be understanding of truth, all representations must dissolve. When this representation, the last of the conventional subject-object understanding, dies, it dissolves in its source – the light of which the mind was informed but could not comprehend. In other words, understanding dissolves in *being* understanding. We no longer understand; we are the understanding. This switchover is a sudden, dramatic moment when we are ejected into the timeless.  
(27)

Although the direct path to Truth can be understood intellectually, it must be actually experienced in its deepest reality before it can be manifested in the crucible of daily life:

It is true that in an ultimate sense there is nothing to teach or learn, nothing to know or do. Yet one is not entitled to say that unless one has actually realized down to one’s bones the truth of those statements. For truly to know that there is nothing to know is to know a great deal. Spiritual traditions are full of such

glittering truths as: "You cannot enter a place you never left"; "The Absolute is a sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere"; "Who sees not God everywhere sees Him truly nowhere"; or "Refrain from seeking buddhahood, since any search is condemned to fail." These quotations reflect the awakened awareness of the masters . . . What others have written about their own deep spiritual experiences can be valuable in showing the way and inspiring one in the spiritual quest – up to a point . . . For the Way, to be a Way, must be walked. Religious doctrines remain mere concepts until translated into actions. It is by acting out the profound teachings that we are transformed. (28)

Our true nature is beyond division and separation – it is complete and lacks nothing. Jesus alluded to this state of wholeness: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them." Reality is infinite and timeless: "We cannot take hold of it; we can only allow ourselves to be seized." This is why great teachers of the non-dual path such as Shankaracharya, Ramana Maharshi and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj stress that "there is no question of going anywhere, arriving anywhere or doing anything; you are already there."

Some visitors ask me, "Please show us a path that will lead to Reality." How can I? All paths lead to unreality. Paths are creations within the scope of knowledge. Therefore, paths and movements cannot transport you into Reality, because their function is to enmesh you within the dimension of knowledge, while the Reality prevails prior to it. To apprehend this, you must stay put at the source of your creation, at the beginning of the knowledge 'I am.' So long as you do not achieve this, you will be entangled in the chains forged by your mind and get enmeshed in those of others. Therefore, I repeat, you stabilize at the source of your Being and then all the chains will snap asunder and you will be liberated. You will transcend time, with the result that you will be beyond the reach of its tentacles and you shall prevail in eternity. (29)

Simple bare attention is the gateway to the expansion of consciousness that leads to a direct perception of Ultimate Reality or the Self. "The moment attention is sustained because it interests us, then we will see that as the attention grows, it becomes alertness, alertness becomes intelligence, intelligence becomes awareness and illuminates consciousness and its infinite content."

To know that simple, changeless being is our true nature and to be able to live this truth in all circumstances of life is liberation and freedom: "When self-concern is quiet, in abeyance, heaven and earth open. The mystery, the essence of life, is not separate from the silent openness of simple listening." The direct way is grounded in *being understanding* and points back to our original nature as it unfolds in the timeless present: "Truth is not found by striving for the attainment of a goal in the future, but it has to do with seeing *what is* this very instant."

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## MINDFULNESS

*'Just this, just this'*

*Ryokan*

*Zen poet*

### The State of Inattention

Mindfulness is a direct and immediate awareness of what is happening each moment of life. Yet most of the time we pass through life half asleep, in a state of inattention. "Everyone has some degree of mindfulness. The ordinary business of life, driving a car, baking bread, and so on requires that we are mindful or attentive to the present moment to some extent. But this usually alternates each minute with long lapses of forgetfulness."

When we look at our lives, it's amazing to see how much of the time we live on automatic pilot, half asleep, unaware, oblivious to what we are doing and what goes on around us. We can walk down the street and all of a sudden find we've arrived at our destination, and yet remember nothing at all of what we saw or thought or heard while we were walking. If we reflect on how many things we have done half-heartedly, we can feel our hesitation, our distraction, our fears, and the deadening effect they have had on our life. When we are mindful, there is a quality of being total, of being wholeheartedly and fully present for any activity . . . When we have given something our wholehearted attention, whether work or school or a relationship or dharma practice, there is a certain energy and joy that arise in the mind. It may not even matter so much what results we end up with, because in doing something completely – with awareness and in a wholehearted way – the very doing is in itself satisfying. To live with mindfulness is to live in a caring and heartfelt way. (1)

The essence of mindfulness is to be open to and aware of the reality of the present moment. But initially it is difficult to dwell in the present *now* as the mind naturally inclines to memories of the past or speculations of the future. "There may be a certain effort to focus on the nowness, but perhaps only twenty percent of the consciousness is based on the present and the rest is scattered into the past or the future. Therefore there is not enough force to see directly what is there."

One must develop the ability to know the situation. In other words one has to develop a panoramic awareness, an all-pervading awareness, knowing the situation *at that very moment*. It is a question of knowing the situation and opening one's eyes to that very moment of newness, and this is not particularly a mystical experience or anything mysterious at all, but just direct, open and clear perception of what *is now*. And when a person is able to see what *is now* without being in-

fluenced by the past or any expectation of the future, but just seeing the very moment of *now*, then at that moment there is no barrier at all. For a barrier could only arise from associations with the past or expectation of the future. So the present moment has no barriers at all. (2)

When we begin to examine and investigate our body, mind and feelings, we realize how conditioned and reactive our states are. But mindful awareness opens the possibility of consciously choosing a healthier, non-reactive response to whatever arises in our life experiences. “To live free of patterns is to live in awareness. Our personality is made up of patterns of reaction that prevent us from responding appropriately to the present moment.”

There are two levels of mindful awareness: the initial perception of an object, thought, feeling or sensation, and then the conditioned reaction:

So there is the superficial awareness of the tree, the bird, the door, and there is the response to that, which is thought, feeling, emotion. Now when we become aware of this response, we might call it a second depth of awareness. There is the awareness of the rose, and the awareness of the response to the rose. Often we are unaware of this response to the rose. In reality it is the same reality which sees the rose and which sees the response. It is one movement and it is wrong to speak of the outer and inner awareness. When there is a visual awareness of the tree without any psychological involvement there is no division in relationship. But when there is a psychological response to the tree, this response is a conditioned response, it is the response of past memory, past experiences, and this response is a division in relationship. This response is the birth of what we shall call the “me” in relationship and the “non-me.” This is how you place yourself in relationship to the world. This is how you create the individual and the community. The world is seen not as it is, but in its various relationships to the “me” of memory. Now can there be an awareness, an observation of the tree, without any judgement, and can there be an observation of the response, the reaction, without any judgement? In this way we eradicate the principle of division, the principle of “me” and “non-me,” both in looking at the tree and in looking at ourselves. (3)

The central role of conscious attention lies at the heart of mindfulness. “Attention is the ability to experience what arises without falling into the conditioned reactions that cause suffering. Attention is always present in potential but is unable to function because of conditioning.”

The essential tool is attention – not the weak, unstable, reactive attention that is part of our automatic functioning, but the strong, stable, and volitional attention cultivated in such disciplines as meditation. Active attention, composed of mindfulness and awareness, is the key. Attention, in this sense, is not intellectual or physical. It is energy, the same kind of energy that powers emotions. Attention is used to dismantle the wall that separates us from what we are. This wall

consists of conditioned patterns of perception, emotional reactions and behaviors. The wall has many components: conventional notions of success and failure, the belief that I am a separate and independent entity, reactive emotional patterns, passivity, an inability to open to others, and misperceptions about the nature of being. Dismantling these habituated conditioned patterns is not a smooth process. Things don't unfold in a neat progression. Attention is the one principle on which we can always rely. We meet every problem encountered by bringing attention to what arises in experience. (4)

### **Quality of Attention and Awareness**

With mindfulness we simply notice, simply observe what is happening in the present moment. In the words of Krishnamurti: "There is a quality of energy which can be called an awareness – an awareness in which there is no evaluation, judgement, condemnation or comparison but merely an attentive observation, a seeing of things exactly as they are, both inwardly and outwardly." In the Buddhist tradition mindfulness is sometimes referred to as *bare attention*:

Buddhist meditation takes this untrained, everyday mind as its natural starting point, and it requires the development of one particular attentional posture – of naked, or bare, attention. Defined as "the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens *to us* and *in us* at the successive moments of perception," bare attention takes this unexamined mind and opens it up, not by trying to change anything, but by observing the mind, emotions, and body the way they are. It is the fundamental tenet of Buddhist psychology that this kind of attention is, in itself, healing, that by the constant application of this attentional strategy, all of the Buddha's insights can be realized for oneself . . . This is what is meant by bare attention: just the *bare* facts and *exact* registering, allowing things to speak for themselves as if seen for the first time, distinguishing any reactions from the core event. (5)

By developing mindfulness we can learn to be aware of our mental, emotional and physical states without being caught in them. "In every moment of mindfulness, whatever the object is, whether it is the breath, sensations or sounds, thoughts or emotions, in every moment of simply noting and noticing what's there, there's no reactivity in the mind. There's no clinging and no conditioning, just an accepting awareness of what is present."

Mindfulness is non-conceptual awareness, an impartial watchfulness, pure perception without evaluation, bare attention. It always occurs in the present, in the now. "Total attention includes, never excludes. Superficiality of attention is inattention; total attention includes the superficial and hidden, the past and its influence on the present, moving into the future."

It is the direct and immediate experiencing of whatever is happening , without the medium of thought. It comes before thought in the perceptual process. Mindfulness is present-moment awareness. It takes place in the here and now. It is the observance of what is happening right now, in the present. It stays forever in the present, perpetually on the crest of the ongoing wave of passing time. If you are remembering your second-grade teacher, that is memory. When you become aware that you are remembering your second-grade teacher, that is mindfulness. If you then conceptualize the process and say to yourself, “Oh, I am remembering,” that is thinking. (6)

Mindfulness requires a neutral attitude toward the object of attention, much like a member of an audience watching with interest the performance of a play. “Mindfulness is the quality of mind which notices what is present, without judgment, without interference. It is like a mirror that clearly reflects what comes before it. It is knowing things as they are.”

The Buddha said that we must practice insight to see clearly that which is. To do so we have to first destroy attachment and aversion to the object. Therefore, while being mindful of mental states and matter, we have to be carefully watchful and mentally alert. Developing desireless awareness is the right understanding of the application of mindfulness. It is similar to watching the characters acting in a play. As for the character who has not yet appeared, we do not desire to see him. Similarly we do not desire to follow or hold the characters who are going off stage. We keep our attention upon the character who is acting. Our only interest is in seeing the characters performing the play and not the directing of it. (7)

Mindfulness or pure awareness has been compared to a mirror which reflects what is happening exactly the way it is happening. It is akin to a scientist observing something under a microscope without any preconceived notions – just seeing the object exactly like it is. “The function of the microscope is just to clearly present what is there. Mindfulness need not refer to the past or the future; it is fully in the now.”

Mindfulness is nonjudgmental observation. It is the ability of the mind to observe without criticism. With this ability, one sees things without condemnation or judgment. One is surprised by nothing. One simply takes a balanced interest in things exactly as they are in their natural states. One does not decide and does not judge. One just observes . . . It is psychologically impossible for us to objectively observe what is going on within us if we do not at the same time accept the occurrence of our various states of mind. This is especially true with unpleasant states of mind. In order to observe our own fear, we must accept the fact that we are afraid. We can't examine our own depression without accepting it fully. The same is true for irritation and agitation, frustration, and all those other uncomfortable emotional states. You can't examine something fully if you are busy rejecting its existence. Whatever experience we may be having, mindfulness just accepts it. It is simply another of life's occurrences, just another thing to be aware of. (8)

As the process of mindfulness ripens we slowly gain control over our own attention:

In the beginning of mindfulness practice, we may be distracted or overcome by hindrances. But slowly awareness works its magic. We observe, come back from being lost, begin again, and gradually our mind becomes more accepting, less reactive, and less judgmental. We do not get so totally lost in discursive thoughts. A soft and gentle awareness allows our mind and heart to relax, to loosen, to open. (9)

It is impossible to be mindful all the time, but what is crucial is to be aware of when we slip back to a state of inattention:

*Questioner:* How can I be attentive all the time? It's impossible!

*Krishnamurti:* That's quite right. It is impossible. But to be aware of your inattention is of the greatest importance, not how to be attentive all the time. It is greed that asks the question, "How can I be attentive all the time?" One gets lost in the practice of being attentive. The practice of being attentive is inattention. You cannot practice to be beautiful, or to love. When hate ceases the other is. Hate can cease only when you give your whole attention to it, when you learn and do not accumulate knowledge about it. Begin very simply.

*Questioner:* What is the point of your talking if there is nothing we can practise after having heard you?

*Krishnamurti:* The hearing is of the greatest importance, not what you practise afterwards. The hearing is the instantaneous action. The practice gives duration to problems. Practice is total inattention. Never practise: you can only practise mistakes. Learning is always new. (10)

Some spiritual teachings, such as Buddhism, distinguish a number of levels or degrees of attention and mindfulness:

According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there are four kinds of mindfulness. First comes average mindfulness – the attention that springs naturally and spontaneously through our own interest in a particular person, situation or phenomenon. For the most part it's concerned with worldly matters and lasts as long as the interest itself. The second kind is cultivated or generated mindfulness – the type that we intentionally apply to particular objects of awareness in order to stabilize or deepen our understanding of them. This can be considered the general practice of mindfulness: a highly focused and alert presence of mind free from judgment, evaluation, reactivity. The third kind is abiding mindfulness: the well-trained mind is sufficiently tamed to rest naturally, without wavering, wherever it is focused. Accomplished meditation masters

can sustain this kind of concentrated or one-pointed mindfulness for hours, days, or even longer, uninterrupted by distractions. The fourth is Dharmakaya mindfulness, or innate wakefulness, where awareness itself remains undistracted from its own nature. In other words, there is no observer “I” noticing awareness within our consciousness, nor can anything within or outside our consciousness diffuse its energy . . . The fourth and ultimate kind of mindfulness is not acquired through practice. Instead it is already present within us, and we come to realize it as a result of cultivating the other three kinds of mindfulness. As the true essential nature of the mind, it is regarded as being the ground as well as the fruit of practice. The other parts are the growth or the pathway connecting the ground and the fruit. The catalyst for this growth, the force that moves us along the way, is meditation.

(11)

The quality of attention can be developed and enhanced. “The development of attention is not linear. As you practise mindfulness, your ability in attention will increase, but it will be clearer and more stable on some days than others.”

Attention is not a concrete object that we can manufacture or reproduce. Attention is an ability that can be developed, just as physical stamina and flexibility can. Attention is cultivated by repeatedly exercising it, just as flexibility is developed by repeated stretching. In meditation, we first exercise attention in a small way by experiencing the breath – feeling the coming and going of the breath in attention. As attention grows, it becomes stronger and can operate at higher and higher levels of energy. As a result, we become progressively more present in our lives. Cultivating attention is like cultivating a plant. Nobody makes a plant grow. A seed grows into a plant by itself when conditions are right. In meditation practice, we provide the right conditions for the seed of attention to grow. We all have the seed of attention already. The seed is natural awareness, or original mind. Natural awareness is present in every moment of experience but is usually obscured by conditioned patterns. For attention to grow, the operation of habituated patterns has to be interrupted, at least temporarily. (12)

Mindfulness is a way of opening our attention to the reality of the present moment. “With mindfulness we explore, moment to moment, the truth of what is arising within our own experience. True awareness is a strength and maturity of mind that sees life without judgment, comment, resistance or holding on.”

Moments spent in awareness and mindfulness are truly lived, while moments spent in repetitive habits and conditioned patterns are not fully lived. “To live, on the other hand, is to be with the beauty of the present moment, to be with the now, the here, the present.”

The present moment, *now*, is the home of mindfulness, not the past or future. “The basic practice is to be present, right here. The goal is also the technique. Precisely being in this moment, neither suppressing nor wildly letting go, but being precisely aware of what you are.”

When you listen to music, you are hearing the present music at that time. You hear the music of the moment. Now is a vast thing. Past and future can't exist without now. Otherwise, without the criterion of now, they cease to be past and future. Now is all the time, and it is choiceless . . . There is always this precision of now, which is there all the time and which helps us to relate with the past and the future. From this point of view, the choices we make depend on how much we are accurately in the now. Conceptions come from either future or past. Somehow they don't apply now. The absence of conceptions is very helpful, and the absence of conceptions also becomes the source of learning, which is now. The minute when you begin to speculate, that moment is already past. Now can only be perceived and experienced, rather than thought of . . . The present moment is really the only thing. It's the one thing, the choiceless choice. (13)

## **Self-Knowledge and Transformation**

Mindfulness and conscious awareness impart a subtle energy with great transformative power. Developing and deepening attention and awareness is a prelude to self-understanding and the ability to live in harmony with ourselves and with the world. Mindfulness is the key to self-knowledge and eventually wisdom:

In the development of wisdom, one quality of mind above all others is the key to practice. This quality is mindfulness, attention or self-recollection. The most direct way to understand our life situation, who we are and how our mind and body operate, is to observe with a mind that simply notices all events equally. This attitude of non-judgmental, direct observation allows all events to occur in a natural way. By keeping the attention in the present moment, we can see more and more clearly the true characteristics of our mind and body process. (14)

The awakened awareness of mindfulness can transform how we live our lives. By exercising more conscious control over our moment-to-moment moods and desires, we can interact more skilfully and compassionately with other people. "The capacity to be mindful, to observe without being caught in our experience, is both remarkable and liberating. With mindfulness we can direct our attention to observe what is going on inside us, and study how our body, mind and emotions operate."

Mindfulness is simply paying attention to what we are doing in the moment. It leads to liberation from the tyranny of the conditioned self and allows our true unconditioned nature to emerge:

Life has conditioned us to create and protect the self, and this habit doesn't die easily. Still, we can begin to let go of this conditioning by paying attention to the behaviour patterns that serve to keep the self intact. With practice, we

can become aware of conditioned responses before acting on them. In Buddhism this is the point of liberation. The moment a thought or desire pops up, we can choose to respond in a way that is different from our habitual, self-serving response. Mindfulness allows us to seize the moment between the impulse to act and the action itself. We can choose to respond in a new and creative way, or we can choose to simply watch as the impulse fades away. Either way we have claimed our freedom . . . Freeing ourselves of conditioning, we become more spontaneous. We may surprise ourselves, as well as those who thought they knew us. The self that seemed so solid and predictable begins to melt, and we become more comfortable with our true self, which is fluid and unfixed. Our own experience confirms that our true Self is no-self, our true nature is no-nature. We are completely free. (15)

Mindfulness shines the light of attention on many of our unconscious behaviours and acts as a transformative impulse. “The practice of attention and the operation of habitual patterns are incompatible.”

As we practice attention, we see the conditioning that runs our lives more and more clearly. We see how our reactions and conditioned behaviors create difficulties and suffering for everyone, including us. At first we are not able to change our behavior, but continued work in cultivating attention eventually opens up the possibility of acting differently. One day, instead of reacting to a situation, we see another possibility and do it. Everything changes. With the first cut into a pattern of reactive behavior, we realize that we can live and function in the world without relying on conditioned behaviors and the self-images underlying them. We live in attention. Now, as soon as we are aware that habituated patterns are operating, we use attention to cut through them and then do what the situation requires. (16)

Mindfulness transforms habitual reactions to the impacts and experiences of life, so that even seemingly mundane events are seen in a new light. The light of awareness slowly changes the conditioned patterns of behaviour that bind us and prevent the flowering of our full potential as human beings:

Subjective reactions exposed to the light of attention and awareness lose their grip on you. They are there. But they lose their hold on you, they lose the power to distort and twist your responses. So observation without any conscious effort on the part of the individual, sustained observation, results in a qualitatively new awareness with which one can live and move. Cook a meal, scrub the floor, wash the dishes, work in the office, meet the situations of life with awareness. (17)

Insight, inner transformation and freedom of choice are the fruits of conscious attention and mindfulness:

Change by choice becomes possible only when we have free attention, a level of attention that is not completely absorbed by conditioning. The ability to act and respond (rather than react) depends on the ability to maintain such a level of attention. Internal transformative work is primarily destructive. Those parts of our lives that result from and depend on habituated patterns will fall apart. In other words, to do this work, we must be willing to die to the life we have known. The essence of this dismantling process is the ability to maintain attention in the face of habituated reactions and not be consumed by them. Therefore, the initial work of internal transformation is cultivating attention, and meditation practice is one of the oldest and most reliable methods. (18)

With the development of mindfulness and conscious awareness it is possible to harmonize with the whole. “There is no need to struggle or be in conflict with what is happening. By bringing a precise attentiveness and quality of openness to the whole range of our experience, moment to moment, the nature of reality will reveal itself.”

The essence of all internal transformative work is original mind – the open, natural awareness that is our human heritage. Conditioned patterns of perception and behavior prevent this natural awareness from manifesting in our lives. Internal transformative work consists of dismantling habituated patterns that cause us to ignore what is taking place inside and around us. Attention is the primary tool. (19)

Awareness itself is the means by which the conditioned, separate self is transformed. Mindfulness moves us from the world of concepts to the actuality of lived experience. “If there is present awareness, fear is seen clearly as an abstraction – a future anxiety born from memory’s blueprint. It is the same with physical and emotional pain. When I cease to own it I liberate myself from its bondage and see it simply as it is.”

If I drop abstraction and move my awareness, for instance, to my bodily sensations, I discover there is a symphony going on. Not necessarily in tune, but nevertheless constantly changing and moving, coming and going. Something arises and then disappears, followed by something else rising to take its place. There is very little that I can control or manipulate. It is immeasurable and unknown, coming into being and then passing away. In the same way, if I let go and listen, touch, taste, smell, or see, there is no way of knowing beforehand the exact quality of those sensations. I could say that I can anticipate the sound of a bird singing, but it is only information based on memory and is neither alive nor vital. The sound I actually hear, the sound of “what is,” will not be the same as my abstraction of it. When I first listen to the sound I will try to grasp it and label it in order to control it. When I let go of that control, there is simply the listener and the sound. When the listener is dropped, there is only the sound. I am no longer there – there is simply the naked and vibrant energy of “what is.” Nothing is needed; all is fulfilled. It is within the very alchemy of this timeless presence that freedom resides. (20)

When awareness is not coloured by personal conditioning, it leads to direct insight and clear perception. “Transformation can only occur with ‘seeing’ the fact. There’s no ‘seeing’ if there is condemnation or justification or identification with the fact. ‘Seeing’ is only possible when the brain is not actively participating, but observing, abstaining from classification, judgement and evaluation.”

That leads us to an awareness without choice – to be aware without any like or dislike. When there is this really simple, honest, choiceless awareness, it leads to another factor which is attention . . . When one is attentive, choicelessly aware, then out of that comes insight. Insight is not an act of remembrance, the continuation of memory. Insight is like a flash of light. You see with absolute clarity, all the complications, the consequences, the intricacies. Then this very insight is action, complete. In that there are no regrets, no looking back, no sense of being weighed down, no discrimination. This is pure, clear insight – perception without any shadow of doubt. (21)

## Skilful Living

Approaching life with mindfulness and awareness allows us to act less egocentrically and more skilfully and compassionately in the world. In the words of Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh: “We have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive. Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment.”

We can nourish a powerful awareness that can eventually cut through our deepest assumptions and help us live awake and in truth. We can find the freedom to choose an action that takes into account the circumstances present at any given time in any given situation – doing *what best serves life*. Taking action that best serves life means to take action that comes out of being as aware as possible of the many conditions present in any situation. It is action based not on our self-centered view of life but one that considers whatever other conditions our awareness holds in the situation. (22)

Mindfulness practice engages us fully with life and develops qualities of wisdom and compassion. “Wisdom is an ongoing process of discovery that unfolds when we live with balanced and full awareness in each moment. It grows out of our sincerity and genuine openness, and it can lead us to a whole new world of freedom.”

[Mindfulness] leads to freedom. It leads to living more in the moment, fully experiencing what’s there, not holding on to it, not greeting things with preconceptions but seeing them clearly as they are. It leads to the letting go of attachments

and therefore less suffering, to less selfishness which means more love and joy, more compassion for other beings and a more gentle flow with what is. (23)

Wisdom and skilful living arise when we fully embrace the reality of the present moment , whatever its nature. “When walking, you just walk. When you eat, you are right there just eating. Plunge your whole life into what you are doing at that very moment and live that way. Whatever you do, whatever the task at hand, your whole life is there at that moment.”

Anyone who has used the moments and days and years of his or her life to become wiser, kinder, and more at home in the world has learned from what has happened right now. We can aspire to be kind right in the moment, to relax and open our heart and mind to what is in front of us in the moment. Now is the time. If there's any possibility for enlightenment, it's right now, not at some future time. Now is the time. Now is the only time. How we relate to it creates the future. In other words, if we're going to be more cheerful in the future, it's because of our aspiration and exertion to be cheerful in the present. What we do accumulates; the future is the result of what we do right now . . . Right now we are creating our state of mind for tomorrow, not to mention this afternoon, next week, next year, and all the years of our lives. (24)

Mindfulness takes an equal interest in all aspects of our inner and outer life. “It is through the power of mindfulness that we can come to a place of balance and rest. Mindfulness is that quality of attention which notices without choosing, without preference; it is a choiceless awareness that, like the Sun, shines on all things equally.”

Can we make our awareness so inclusive that we're willing to be attentive to the whole range of our experience? It's somewhat like going on a long journey in a strange land, a journey that takes us through many different kinds of terrain – through mountains and jungle, desert and rain forest. If we have the mind of a true explorer, when we're in the mountains we're not thinking, “Oh, if only I were in the desert now.” And when we're in the desert we're not daydreaming of rain forests. If there's a real sense of exploration, we're interested in every new place that we come to. (25)

The practice of mindfulness brings a deep appreciation for the simple, everyday experiences of life which become a gateway to the cultivation of wisdom. As Alan Watts observed: “The art of living consists in being sensitive to each moment, in regarding it as utterly new and unique, in having the mind open and receptive.”

Activities such as shopping, answering the telephone, typing, working in a factory, studying in school, dealing with our parents or our children, going to a funeral, checking ourselves in at the maternity department of the hospital – whatever we do is sacred. The way we develop that attitude is by seeing things as they are, by paying attention to the energy of the situation, and by not expecting further enter-

tainment from our world. It is a matter of simply being, being natural, and always being mindful of everything that takes place in our day to day life. (26)

Mindful awareness centered in the present can nourish both individuals and whole societies. "Such awareness can help to free you from speed, chaos, neurosis and resentments of all kinds. It can free you from the obstacles to nowness."

The way to experience nowness is to realize that this very moment, this very point in your life, is always *the occasion*. So the consideration of where you are and what you are, on the spot, is very important. That is one reason that your family situation, your domestic everyday life, is so important. You should regard your home as sacred, as a golden opportunity to experience nowness. Appreciating sacredness begins very simply by taking an interest in the details of your life. Interest is simply applying awareness to what goes on in your everyday life – awareness while you're cooking, awareness while you're driving, awareness while you're changing diapers, even awareness while you're arguing . . . The principle of nowness is also very important to any effort to establish an enlightened society . . . When corruption enters a culture, it is because that culture ceases to be *now*; it becomes past and future. Periods in history where great art was created, when learning advanced, or peace spread, were all *now*. Those situations happened at the very moment of their *now*. But after *now* happened, then those cultures lost their *now*. (27)

Formal meditation practice prepares the ground for extending mindfulness and attention to daily life. "There is a real beauty in a truly mindful person: with doing something wholeheartedly, being at one without any resistance. Only when attention come out of unself-conscious doing can there be true awareness."

The second effort in meditation is to extend attention to daily life outside formal practice. We practice by mixing attention with the activities of life. The intention is to maintain attention as we go about the day. We begin with simple activities such as walking or other exercises and simple manual tasks such as washing dishes and washing the car. We then extend the practice to more complex activities, such as conversation. Step by step, we bring attention to the various activities of life, noting the areas in which we habitually lose attention and fall into reaction. We make those areas the focus of our practice of attention during the day. The work of internal transformation comes alive as the abilities and experiences developed in formal practice are exercised in daily life. We move out of habituated patterns of behavior. What happens, for instance, when another driver zips into a parking spot in a crowded mall just as you are about to back into it? Can you observe the rising of your reaction as the movement of mind, or do you jump out of your car and let the other person have it? (28)

When we develop attention and mindfulness we can engage in life more skilfully, acting consciously rather than reacting to life experiences on the basis of conditioned and learned pat-

terns. "Wisdom is simple. It is simply being in harmony with the here and now. Nothing to gain, nothing to lose. Mindful of the flow, the person is not deluded; their life is in perfect harmony with the natural order."

The more we practice, the less dogmatic we become. All we can do is bring our attention to bear on situations we encounter in life, using attention to cut through the operation of habituated patterns. We show up in each situation, open to what is happening, see what is, and serve what is true to the limit of our perception. We act and receive the result. If the situation blows up in our face, we have to pay. We will see our part in it if, and only if, we have brought all our attention to our action. We do not blame anyone for the result because we know we did our best. Instead, we learn about where we were weak, blind, stupid, or out of touch. There is no other way to learn. Any lesson is cheap if it doesn't cost us our ability to make further efforts in waking up. In effect, we approach each situation as a mystery and know that all we can do is be present, to the best of our ability, in that mystery. We don't need beliefs, we don't need comforting, and we don't need explanations. We can be open and awake, staying present with all that arises in our experience. (29)

Intelligence flowers in the light of attention and awareness. "Intelligence is sensitive awareness of the totality of life; life with all its problems, contradictions, miseries, joys. To be aware of all of this, without choice and without being caught by any one of its issues and to flow with the whole of life is intelligence."

In the fully awakened state there is no separation between observer and observed -- there is only light, peace and clarity. "If you are watchful, never letting a thought go by, then the brain becomes very quiet. Then you watch in great silence and that silence has immense depth, a lasting incorruptible beauty." When the mind is quiet a great sensitivity of perception arises to the totality of life in all its varied expressions. Krishnamurti describes this state in his *Notebook*:

The complete stillness of the brain is an extraordinary thing; it is highly sensitive, vigorous, fully alive, aware of every outward movement but utterly still. It is still as it is completely open, without any hindrance, without any secret wants and pursuits; it is still as there is no conflict which is essentially a state of contradiction. It is utterly still in emptiness; this emptiness is not a state of vacuum, a blankness; it is energy without a centre, without a border. Walking down the crowded street, smelly and sordid, with the buses roaring by, the brain was aware of the things about it and the body was walking along, sensitive, alive to the smells, to the dirt, to the sweating labourers but there was no centre from which watching, directing, censoring took place. During the whole of that mile and back the brain was without movement, as thought and feeling. (30)

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## ATTENTION

*'The very first moment you have an opportunity to lose your attention – you will!'*  
G.I. Gurdjieff

### Levels, Degrees and Qualities

Attention has sometimes been called a “living substance,” with many different levels and gradations. “Attention can be measured like a wine, like silk. It may be very coarse, or it may be very fine and supple.” Attention has also been compared to light. Just like light, it can be absent (darkness) or very dim. It may be narrowly focused, diffused and scattered or very bright.

Attention is a discriminating power which determines which elements on the screen of consciousness become focused upon at any particular time. For instance, in situations of danger or physical survival attention is automatically directed by the instinctive/moving center. “When we speak of ‘attention’ in ordinary life circumstances, it is a distant derivative of the awesome *attention* residing within our instinctive center. A moment’s thought about the incredibly complex ability and power of the instinctive center to monitor all of our vital functions and to keep adjusting from moment to moment (to preserve the optimal physiological state) should give us a benchmark against which to measure the qualities and attributes of the attention we are able to bring to our thoughts, feelings and actions.”

Some spiritual teachings distinguish five levels or degrees of attention possible for a human being:

- No attention, inattention
- Dispersed, distracted or undirected attention
- Captive or identified attention
- Directed, concentrated or one-pointed attention
- Open, free or conscious attention

Scientific studies have shown that most people can only focus their attention on one single thing for less than two minutes. “The ordinary person has no attention – a floating attention – one moment here, next moment there. Their attention is always diverted from one point to another.”

Our degree of attention changes when our interests change. “Where my attention goes, I go. In general, my attention is not rooted in anything; it can be held by something outside me. I have to find the root of my attention in myself in order to observe myself from inside.” For most people, attention and its various qualities, levels and possibilities is an unexamined phenomenon:

What do we know of our attention? From where does it come? What is its origin? We are obviously unable to answer these questions. Yet we feel that this very extraordinary phenomenon, this force, this energy, is part of Creation. Every human being, at birth, receives a certain quantity of this vital force and, in the course of his or her existence, it will be the integrator of all things within and everything manifested . . . At no moment can we live without attention. Every day we do all sorts of things. Yes, but with what attention? With what overlay of dreams? Our manifestations reveal the contact we have with our attention. Quite often we fail to notice that we have none, that we are inattentive, that we have acted in various ways without being present to all these moments of our lives. Most of the time our attention is carried along by outer events. A trifle captures it; it is not free. (1)

Normally our attention is not free or voluntary. "It is of low quality, without power, and flows passively towards the outside. But this attention has the possibility of being transformed, of achieving a purer quality." Directed and conscious attention reveals aspects of outer or inner reality that are usually ignored (and hence invisible) by our normal, undirected surface attention. "Intentionally directed attention implies the presence of a choice for an individual; a situation where alternatives are recognized and a decision is made as to where the attention is to be placed."

When *attention* is directed (or *brought*) to the developing impression, properties that are intrinsic to the perception begin to be noticed. For example, when there is little or no attention present at the point of incoming impressions, the tree that you may be glancing at as you leave the house, is just an indistinct object. When *attention* is present, the colors of the bark and limbs may be noticed, as well as the varied limb structure, the basic leaf forms that characterize the species of tree, the shades of green that are present. Gentle movements of the leaves and small limbs induced by a light breeze may be noticed and the contrast between the green leaves and the light blue of the sky beyond may stand out. In this act of *paying attention and noticing*, the perceptual experience itself has begun to be explored. All of the properties are there, within the perception, but had been unnoticed until attention entered and a process of 'taking apart' or 'seeing into' the impression was initiated. (2)

The fact that most people have very little control over their attention becomes apparent when they attempt to observe themselves as a means of self-study and self-knowledge. "After only a moment of self-observation, your attention gets caught up in thoughts and feelings about what you have observed, and so it gets taken away from your observation." Our inability to control our attention is usually unrecognized:

Attention is the weapon for inner work, the tool for inner work. It is absolutely indispensable. And at the same time, we have quite distorted ideas of our power over attention. This is to a large extent because we know from our experience that there are many occasions in our lives when we have the impression that we

are paying attention to the same thing for a long time, and we call this concentration of attention; but if you begin to watch the process closely and you are honest with yourself, you will see that this is not concentration of attention at all. It is attention being drawn in a certain way. Maybe there is an initial effort to place the attention, but very soon it gets drawn and held. There is no control over attention. You may also see that we are sometimes taught to turn our attention towards something, but unfortunately we are never taught to take our attention away from something, and this is just as much a part of the control of attention as directing attention in a desired direction. (3)

Conscious attention is a uniquely human capacity and the quality of our attention is the key to inner growth and development. Professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman speaks of his own experience of consciously working with attention: "Looking at something in myself without trying to change it or judge it was itself a force, an energy that had an action upon what was seen. And indeed, sometimes it had a transforming action upon my entire state of being. Such was the power of pure attention. I began to understand that attention and self-observation was itself an instrument of change, but change of a kind one could never have imagined or expected. Change in the direction of human sensitivity, presence, being."

I had already seen *something* of the importance of attention during my attempts at the practice of self-observation. I could understand through experience that our lives are what they are in large part because of the weakness of and passivity of our attention. We are *taken*, our attention is taken, swallowed by our streams of automatic thought; we constantly disappear into our emotional reactions; we are taken by our fears and desires, our pleasures and pains, by our daydreams and imaginary worries. And, being *taken*, we no longer exist as I, myself, here. We do not live our lives; we are *lived* and we may eventually die without ever having awakened to what we really are – without having lived. (4)

## Developing Attention and Awareness

In talks with his students, Gurdjieff stressed that without the development of the power of attention real inner work and transformation was impossible. In the words of his pupil Olga de Hartmann:

Mr. Gurdjieff told us very seriously that attention is absolutely indispensable for any work we wished to do with him. If we did not understand that, nothing could bring us to the aim for which we came to him. All of us there already felt that we were more than just a body. We knew that 'something else' was in us, and we wished to know: what *is* that? What have we to do with that? How can we call to it? How can we bring it out? How can we rely on it and not depend only on the body? All this was really a burning question for us, and Mr. Gurdjieff made it clear

that if we didn't study attention – not study in the ordinary way, but putting all our attention on developing that attention – we would arrive nowhere. (5)

Self-development requires a free and conscious attention that isn't captured or fragmented. "Our habitual attention is much too fleeting; it has no stability, no continuity. In this world where we lead our lives, we need a much more stable attention. This attention is like a little flame that tries to hold its own in the world."

Normally we have very little control over our attention, but it is possible to enhance the quality of attention and to develop it to a higher and finer level where it becomes voluntary or conscious attention:

I need to learn that attention can manifest in a completely unstable, vagrant manner. For example, in my intellectual functioning the vagrant attention lets itself be swept along by everything that attracts it: words, images, memories and every event in my day can sweep it up, each in its own way. I go out into the street; the shop windows, the people, constantly take this attention. It has no more stability than a butterfly. Go out, take a walk with the intention of thinking about your own affairs. A dog barks at you and takes all your attention . . . and what takes place in the intellect also takes place in the emotional and moving functions. Sometimes when a problem of great difficulty comes up, my attention can be concentrated, condensed; its quality changes, it acquires more force, it is sustained by an element of desire or interest. No longer vagrant, it is captured; an especially strong motive has taken over. There is, however, a very different kind of attention, an attention that is more conscious, more voluntary. Sometimes, on rare occasions, I discover the taste of it. If this occurs in my thought, I see that my thinking becomes clear. And if this occurs in my feeling, I know the feeling of being completely free from my habitual emotions. As for my body, I can also experience in a new way what is happening at its level. ( )

Conscious attention is an agent of transformation and can be developed and refined. "We do have some power of attention, at least on the surface, some capacity to point the attention in a desired direction and hold it there. Although it is fragile, this seed of attention is consciousness emerging from sleep within us." Transformation requires a total attention that arises from all parts of ourselves – body, mind and feelings.

For real inner development to occur, the quality of our attention must be honestly observed, then strengthened and refined. "Be more and more aware of your lack of attention. In the best of cases, we lose it and find it again, but we resign ourselves too easily to having so little attention. We must constantly ask ourselves where our attention is going, where is this force, toward what is it attracted."

In each of us there is this extraordinary instrument, the attention. For a very long time, I cannot say that I govern my attention. I have to see that at every moment it is taken by one thing or another. I need to exercise the possibility of keeping it more on myself, in myself, while continuing the outer work that is expected of me. Self-perfecting is linked to the perfecting of our attention. Our capacity for inner attention provides a measure of our being. (7)

By gathering and collecting one's attention it is possible to return to a calm, observing centre of awareness rather than identifying with every passing thought, emotion, sensation or action. Instead of being at the mercy of external or internal impacts and associations, there will be a mindful presence that holds the reins of attention. "The initial effort is to free my attention from identification. I need to find the effort that will allow the formation of a central core, a more stable center of gravity of my attention."

When the level of attention is strengthened, it becomes possible to gain a degree of control over the relentless pull towards inattention and forgetfulness – the return to sleep. "A central attention may be drawn in different directions, but it always returns to the center."

It is only by working to be present that my attention will develop. When it has a better quality, I struggle to keep it from weakening, I try to prevent its being taken. I try but cannot, and I try again. I begin to understand what this requires from me even if I cannot do it. In the struggle where I come back and then go again towards manifestation, I see that when my attention is completely taken, it is entirely lost to me. But if it does not go too far, it can be pulled back, as by a magnet. In that movement of my attention, I learn something of its nature. I will have to go towards manifestation, and I will always lose myself unless my attention goes both towards life and towards the inside. ( )

Directed attention is like a fine tool or instrument which can be used for either the right or wrong reason. There is a saying: '*From the same food the hornet produces poison and the bee produces honey.*' Henriette Lannes, a student of Gurdjieff, stressed the importance of this tool for inner development: "I cannot do anything except train my attention, and if I think that this is not enough, I am a fool. To perfect one's attention is to perfect oneself."

In many spiritual traditions specific methods are employed to anchor the attention. Some of these methods, such as repetition, visualization and counting exercises are more appropriate in monastic settings, while paying attention to the sensations of the body may be more effective in the circumstances of everyday life. Gurdjieff: "Attention is gained only through conscious labor and intentional suffering, through doing small things voluntarily." Throughout history, the role of attention and its development and refinement has been an integral part of the world's spiritual teachings:

The path to a change in the state of consciousness, to a state in which consciousness truly exists, is, according to all religious teachings, through sustained atten-

tion. In different teachings, the idea of sustained attention takes different forms (prayer, concentration, meditation), but the basic discipline is probably the same. An honest attempt to maintain constant attention on any one thing quickly shows how difficult it is and how far from our usual situation. In Christianity, it is described as constant prayer, but not simply an automatic repetition of phrases. In Gurdjieff's teaching, self-remembering plays a central role – the attempt to be aware of oneself at the same time as one is aware of outside impressions. The most accessible approach to this is through maintained awareness of the sensation of one's body. (9)

The state of a finer, deeper attention can be developed with steady practice and certain specific spiritual exercises:

We must accept that the state of dispersion is normal so long as we have a limited capacity to concentrate. We have to repeat and repeat coming to a collected state. Only repetition will lead to shortening the time required for preparation and increase the time available for practice. There was an exercise that was specifically created for coming to a collected state. I begin by representing with all my attention that I am surrounded by an atmosphere extending a yard, more or less. This atmosphere is displaced according to the movements of the thinking. I concentrate all my attention to prevent the atmosphere from escaping beyond its limits. Then I draw it in consciously, as though sucking it in. I feel, throughout the body, the echo of "I," and silently say "am." I experience the total sensation of being. (10)

One of the principal methods of focusing and developing attention is to consciously place awareness on specific parts of our body and the breathing process. Generally, we are unaware of our breathing and pay little attention to our physical body unless we are experiencing pain, discomfort, physical exertion or certain emotional states. However, this latter level of awareness is a *passive* result of physiological processes and not a conscious effort to direct the attention and remain *present*. The practices of following the breath and sensing the physical body open up a world of new possibilities: "The gradual increasing awareness of one's *being* that results from the continual effort to direct the attention to following (sensing) the breath and sensing the body's movements and states that accompany this effort leads to successive discoveries that concern the miraculous life processes that are perpetually taking place."

The development and control of attention is a precursor to self-remembering and the attainment of higher states of consciousness:

Gurdjieff brought a teaching of the Fourth Way that calls for conscious work rather than obedience. A fundamental idea is that in our ordinary state everything takes place in sleep. And in sleep we can see nothing. We cannot direct our lives by our own will. We are entirely dependent on influences from outside and enslaved by the automatic reactions of our functioning. It is a complete slavery. There is no higher principle, no conscious principle. Man has the possibility to awaken from

this sleep, to awaken to the higher, *to be*. The means is the attention. In sleep the attention is taken. It must be freed and turned in another direction. This is the separation of “*I*” and “*me*.” It is the active force opposed to the passive, the struggle between the *yes* and the *no*. The mobilization of the attention is the first step toward the possibility of self-remembering. Without a different attention, we are obliged to be automatic. With an attention that is voluntarily directed, we go toward consciousness. (11)

### Conscious Attention and Inner Growth

The power of attention is a liberating force. “Inner growth requires the mobilization of our attention. When the attention begins to awaken, we realize that it can become more stable, less like a cork forever bobbing back to the water’s surface.” It is possible to move from a state of distracted attention to a more stable, unified attention which integrates body, mind and feelings:

Maintenance of a conscious attention is not easy. The movement, the obligations of day-to-day existence, completely distract. With no base of operation, no home in one’s organism, the attention serves random thoughts, feelings, and appetites which conflict and tyrannize each other. Sensation of parts or the whole of the body can anchor the attention, provide it with a kind of habitat. The structure, becoming more sensitive, helps to unify attention, so it is less liable to veer into mental channels that consume its power. In turn, perceptions and sensations are quickened, insights are multiplied. Opening to the force of attention evokes a sense of wholeness and equilibrium. One can glimpse a possibility of a state of awareness immeasurably superior to that of the reactive mechanism, an awareness that transcends one’s automatic subject/object mode of response. Freely flowing, the concentrative, transforming effect of conscious attention brings the disparate tempos of the centers to a relatively balanced relationship. Thought, feeling and sensation are equilibrated under this vibrant, harmonizing influence. (12)

Conscious attention opposes the pull of the automatic conditioned functioning of the mind. “All my thoughts, emotions and actions can be held under my attention without excluding or condemning anything. For this I need a certain inner space and an attention that is free. It is only in a state of free attention that true seeing can appear.”

I need to develop a voluntary attention – that is, a conscious attention – which is stronger than my automatism. I must feel the lack of relation between my mind and my body, and see that this relation requires a voluntary attention maintained on both parts . . . Only a conscious attention, which is the opening to a higher force, has the power to prevail over the automatism. But for this the attention must always be occupied voluntarily. A conscious force cannot be automatic. The attention can be stronger or diminish, but the moment when it ceases to be voluntary,

it is taken. The moment it is no longer voluntarily turned toward this relation, the energies separate. I become fragmented and the automatism takes over. The opening to a higher force must become constant. (13)

Voluntary attention does not appear automatically but only through the focusing which provide the necessary energy to sustain the attention. "A collected state is a state of collected attention in which the attention is as whole as possible. This state does not come about by my thought resolving to be collected in order to obtain something better. It comes by seeing – through the vision of my dispersion, of the lack of attention."

This type of attention does not come because it is made captive, not by forcing – I cannot make it appear, just as I cannot force love to appear. Attention comes when it is needed, when it is called by a feeling of necessity. If I really see that I do not understand, that I have lost the direction and the meaning of my life, then at that very moment my attention is called to be here. Without it, I will never be able to be what I am. I do not have the necessary energy. But when I feel this absolute necessity, the attention appears. So I have to come to the feeling of lack, of not understanding, not knowing . . . I can daydream as I walk along a road. But when I have to walk on ice, on a slippery frozen path, I cannot dream. I need all my attention not to fall down. It is the same inside myself. If I have no real interest in myself – if I keep thinking I can answer everything, and pretend that I am able – I will continue dreaming and the attention will never appear. (14)

A free and open attention is not fixed or bound by judgement, evaluation or comparison. In the words of Jeanne de Salzmann: "Could my mind perceive without recognizing and naming, that is, without separating to be someone who looks, judges and knows? For this, I would need an attention I do not know, an attention never separated from what it observes, allowing a total experience without excluding anything."

It is only when I exclude nothing that I am free to observe and understand myself. When my brain can be active, sensitive, alive in a state of attentive immobility, there is a movement of an extraordinary quality that does not belong just to the thinking, the sensation or the emotion. It is a wholly different movement that leads to truth, to what we cannot name. The attention is total without any distraction . . . I begin to see that real knowing is possible only in the moment when my attention is full, when consciousness fills everything. Then there is no distinction; one thing is not more than another. There is pure existence. The creative act is the vision of what takes place. I learn to watch. (15)

When attention is developed and awakened we are able to respond more effectively to the requirements and experiences of life and approach higher, more refined states of consciousness and being. "If I were fully alive, everything would be fully alive around me, as it really is. What is needed for one to experience that? A different kind of attention, active, collected."

The quality of our attention is reflected in the quality of our real knowledge of ourselves. When our attention is automatic, a prisoner of our own mental, emotional and physical associations, all of the external and internal impressions we receive are fragmented. When our attention reaches a level of genuine awareness of ourselves, impressions are particularly alive and penetrating . . . This question of attention is very serious, but our experience remains limited. In us a conscious attention is missing. Only such an attention, through the quality of its movement of energy, can *hold together* the three essential parts of our being: thought, body and feeling. We generally believe that attention comes only from our thinking center, although there exists within us possible levels of attention coming simultaneously from our intellect, our body, and our feeling. At certain moments we see, though perhaps distantly, that this attention – freer but still insufficiently developed in us – is the key to a greater inner opening in which less heavy, finer energies come together. These energies confer life, light, and warmth on our inner world, in the service of a Great Reality in the universe, just as the Sun confers these things on the Earth. For those who seek to awaken to what they truly are, this new attention has more value than anything else in their lives. (1 )

Even the most mundane events of life hold the possibility of exercising a conscious attention that has significant, though unsuspected, value for inner growth and development: “Nothing is worthwhile unless it is lived in the moment. Our aim must be to be present to our lives, not to be solving imaginary problems that distance us from reality.”

One has many opportunities in one’s life to develop control of attention. If you pause to consider the things you have to do every day, I think that you will find that time and again one does things with just sufficient attention and energy to get by; in other words, one’s standard is the lowest possible standard that would not result in disaster or failure. It is very interesting to try to do well small things, according to good standards. Every day we have this opportunity. These small daily things we repeat again and again don’t seem to have much importance at all, but every one of them *can* have importance if we look at them as a means to an end. No one of them need be unimportant from this point of view, but we forget that we are surrounded by opportunities like this. (17)

Conscious attention is free and not mechanical because it can be constantly adjusted in order to maintain its purity and force. “In becoming active, the attention acquires a finer quality and becomes capable of grasping what is taking place on other levels, where vibrations have a different wavelength.”

Attention opens the door to higher levels and states of consciousness and being. “Waking sleep, presence, consciousness: these are the stages that mark man’s slow climb to the fulfillment of his possibilities.”

A man can think, feel and work with the instruments given to him for these purposes, using them automatically from force of habit, without being ‘conscious’ that he thinks, feels or works. He knows it; but he does not experience it. ‘To be conscious’ is first to experience oneself as one who knows this is so, to introduce into mechanical functioning such a quality of attention that a ‘sensation of being’ may arise and persist, where all the physical and psychic processes of which man is the centre unfold themselves at that moment. Then he begins to be relatively ‘present to himself.’ The sensation which this ‘presence’ evokes in him throws a new light on the events in which he is involved and constitutes a state called ‘self-remembering.’ In this state he can come gradually to see his functions as they really are and so begin truly to know himself. Only a great deal later, in the state of ‘objective consciousness,’ can a man hope to attain to a true knowledge of the world and to live on the highest level which a few may, perhaps, be able to reach. (1 )

As the quality of attention develops and matures, new possibilities of inner growth emerge. “In this new relationship of individual attention and a higher impersonal consciousness, a man or woman can become a vessel, serving another energy which can act through the individual, an energy which at the same time transforms the materiality of the body.”

Humanity can begin to occupy its proper place within the chain of being only through an inner work which within the individual human being may be subsumed under the general term attention. The many levels of attention possible for man, up to and including an attention that in traditional teachings has been termed Spirit, are here ranged along a dynamic, vertical continuum that reaches from the level of biological sustenance, which humans require for their physical bodies, up to the incomparably finer sustenance that we require for the inner growth of the soul. This finer substance is obtained through the digestion of “the food of impressions,” a deceptively matter-of-fact phrase that eventually defines the uniquely human cosmic obligation and potentiality of constantly and in everything working for an objective understanding of the Real. (19)

At its highest level of refinement, conscious attention provides a connection between the realm of denser influences and higher, more subtle forms of energy. Gurdjieff pupil William Segal: “Opening to the force of attention evokes a sense of wholeness and equilibrium. One can glimpse a possibility of a state of awareness immeasurably superior to that of the reactive mechanism, an awareness which transcends one’s automatic subject/object mode of response. The transforming effect of conscious attention brings the disparate tempos of the centers to a relatively balanced relationship. Thought, feeling, and sensing are equilibrated under the vibrant, harmonizing influence.”

Attention is the quintessential medium to reveal man’s dormant energies in himself. Whenever one witnesses the state of the body, the interplay of thought and feeling, there is an intimation, however slight, of another current of energy. Through the simple act of attending, one initiates a new alignment of forces . . . Cleared of all in-

ternal noise, conscious attention is an instrument which vibrates like a crystal at its own frequency. It is free to receive the signals broadcast at each moment from a creative universe in communication with all creatures. (20)

In order to perform its function as a mediating bridge to higher, subtle, spiritual energies, attention must become impersonal and universal in nature. “Its source surrounded by mystery, attention communicates energies of a quality that the mind cannot represent. One needs to be at the service of conscious attention; one prepares for its advent through active stillness.”

In quiet, tension-free moments, man’s structure is open to energy flows which are ordinarily blocked. In turn, these energies blend with previously received materials, to serve the higher in a wordless, nameless exchange. Attention is not only mediating; it is transmitting. Giving and receiving, God speaks to man. Receiving and giving, man speaks to God. Just as man’s structure needs to be vivified by the infusion of finer vibrations, those very same vibrations require the mixing of coarse material for their maintenance. Without the upward transmission of energies through the intermediary of conscious attention, the universe would give in to entropy. In man, the smallest deformation of a balanced attention closes down this two-way communication. Alone, the mind cannot maintain it. A relaxed body, too, is needed. Midway between micro- and macro-cosmos, man has his part to play. Returning to the body is a gesture of opening to the attention which, beckoned, is ready to serve its cosmological function. (21)

At its highest level of development, conscious attention is pure perception of things as they are, direct and immediate, complete and whole. “It is an attention which will contain everything and refuse nothing, that will not take sides or demand anything. It will be without possessiveness, without avidity, but always with a sincerity that comes from the need to remain free in order to know.”

Vision, inner vision, is the liberation of an energy that is beyond thinking. It is a total awareness of life because to see is to embrace totality at the very moment. We cannot see part by part, little by little, over time . . . Vision, on the other hand, is observation without thought, without the security of words or names. In a state of pure perception, there is no more aim and no attempt to respond. One simply lives the fact. (22)

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## AWAKENED ATTENTION AND 'I AM'

*'I am the eye with which the universe beholds  
itself and knows that it is divine.'*

*Shelley*

### Conscious Attention

One of the preliminary, yet essential, steps on the spiritual path is to realize our inability to control one of the fundamental qualities of consciousness – the ability to consciously direct our attention. Jeanne de Salzmann: "The work to be present is in the direction of consciousness. In the moment of consciousness there is an immediate impression of direct perception. This is quite different from what we usually call 'consciousness,' which operates more like a reflection faithfully accompanying what I experience and representing it in my mind." The key that unlocks a deeper level of consciousness is refined attention:

Can we become conscious? It is all a question of energies and their relation, with each energy always controlled by a finer one that is more active, more activating, like a magnet. The energy used in our functions – our thoughts, our emotions, our sensations – is passive, inert. Spent in movements toward the outside, this energy suffices in quality for our life as higher animals, but is not fine enough for an inner act of perception, of consciousness. Nevertheless, we do have some power of attention, at least on the surface, some capacity to point the attention in a desired direction and hold it there. Although it is fragile, this seed or bud of attention is consciousness emerging from deep within us. For it to grow, we need to learn to concentrate, to develop this capacity indispensable for preparing the ground. This is the first thing that we do ourselves, not dependent on anyone else. (1)

Gurdjieff spoke of a higher attention or energy that could harmonize the three functions of mind, emotions and body. Professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman relates his own personal, albeit brief, experience of this higher energy when listening to his teacher Jeanne de Salzmann:

Again and again when I heard Madame de Salzmann speak about this higher attention, I felt invited to try to experience it as she spoke. And again and again the way she spoke showed me that I was not *able* to experience it. Even as she spoke of it as the one force, the one energy that could bring all my parts together, the one energy that gave meaning to human life, the energy we were created to receive and manifest as fully human beings – even as she spoke simply and clearly in this way she showed us that we were not experiencing it. Most mercifully of all, we were guided to see that lack, that absence, not to hide from it, not to pretend, not to become "mystics" . . . Once I was sitting in a room with a group of people, listening to her speak. For one fleeting second or microsecond, an

indescribable subtle force gently touched every cell in my body, every hope in my heart, every question in my mind. Or should I say simply, something truly sacred appeared in me and disappeared even as it appeared – like a thousand fine particles of silent light. My heart joyfully rested; my body surrendered all its tension; my mind stopped as wind stops for a second when it changes direction. *I am.* (2)

The ability to control and master attention leads to a deeper level of knowledge of reality and a new form of spontaneous creative energy. "The development of active attention is the key to man's coming under higher influences both in the universe and in himself. Power, which is the ability to live in the world of real causes, begins with the growth of human attention."

The traditions teach us that man loses everything unless he is able to *listen*, to see, to be present both to the lower and the higher elements in himself. In these traditional formulations, man is a bridge; and the bridge is awareness – awareness that is evoked by the struggle for active attention. Apart from that, he is naked, powerless . . . Without active attention, is it ever possible for man to see the inner aspects of reality? Is it because of passive attention that he is beguiled by appearances, both with regard to the nature of the universe and the teachings which are offered to him? Is it because of failure of attention that desire shapes his thought and understanding, and therefore his action? To be without real power: Does that not mean *to act in a false world*, a world that is a construct of the ordinary, passively attracted mind? (3)

Directed attention is a *conscious* effort related to the third state of consciousness, which Gurdjieff called *self-remembering*. It assists in the effort *to be* and create new ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving and acting. "This is a highly experimental stage, demanding of creativity, spontaneity and risk-taking, because one is not yet totally free of the past and all its encumbrances and still not able to stand fully in one's *being*."

Self-remembering is an immediate, present-moment state of consciousness in which the attention is divided simultaneously between the subject (self) and object (other). Fourth Way teacher William Patterson: "This demands a certain quality and strength of attention, of a direct recognition of the *Immediate*, of what-is, of having an awareness that is global in reference to oneself. Consciousness of self is a state predicated on self-remembering – a conscious awareness of the body, of being embodied, of being connected with what is happening internally, as well as what is happening externally."

How long can our attention stay in the Immediate? This is determined by the quality and quantity of available energy and the degree of will and self-knowledge present. The energy is determined by the cumulative effect of our past efforts to move attention from waking state consciousness to self-consciousness. Will and self-knowledge are predicated on the frequency and degree with which we have experienced self-consciousness – that is, an awareness of a commensurate level of being. The self-knowledge spoken of is not descriptive, intellectual

or theoretical but lived material, impressions directly perceived and experienced. The material is vivid and objective in the sense that the impressions are not psychologized, not filtered by the personal, the subjective, but rather perceived through self-consciousness itself. (4)

By bringing conscious attention to the activities of everyday living they can be enriched and given expression in the service of the divine Self. Maharaj Shantananda Saraswati: "All our activities are done because of the inspiration by the Absolute, and are performed only for the Absolute, and everything is achieved by the forces made available by the Absolute."

Conscious actions strengthen the power of attention. If we pay no attention to where we are and what we are doing then all our actions remain involuntary and automatic. Attention releases energy by coordinating the three nervous systems and brings in a 'feeling tone,' an emotional component to what we're doing. Actions become beautiful and refined, creating something that can consciously be offered as service to the divine Self. With this kind of attention, even a task as simple as washing-up is imbued with new and vivid impressions. The balanced freedom of one's posture, the precise and fluid movements, the warm and silky feel of the water, the delightful accuracy with which we pick up and set down the plates and utensils, the perfect gleaming cleanliness of each result, all combine to make a very ordinary event into a new and genuinely artistic experience, pleasurable both to do and watch. Even done just for itself, any attentive action transforms both the experience and the result – but if performed as a service, lovingly offered with the conscious memory of the divine Self as the ever-present witness, life itself is transformed. The 'realised' person performs all their actions in this way, sitting, walking, talking, everything is bestowed with this concentrated, free-flowing attention. (5)

When attention is expanded to include both foreground and background fields of experience in a panoramic awareness, time slows and space expands. Then, the silent, ever-present background of *all that is*, reveals itself. William Patterson: "In embodied presence one experiences – sees, feels, intuits – *what-is*. The world is experienced as it really is: dynamic, fluid, spatial, still, empty, solid, alive. And what is present is both the subject (the perceiver) and the object (what is perceived), that is, subject-object consciousness."

The fourth state of consciousness occurs where the perceiver dissolves in the perceiving. There is no subject, no center, only consciousness. Consciousness-without-an-object. This does not mean the world disappears. But as there is no subject there are no objects in the usual sense; that is, there not being a dualistic subject-object experiencing, the *relationship* with and to objects dynamically changes, as does space and time. Transcending the subject, there is no object in the sense that the foundation of experience has been constrained within the experience of subject-object (how we have unconsciously divided the world and ourselves). As the relationship with oneself is no longer that of a subject in the

midst of objects, what remains? The silence of a centerless, panoramic presence of Being. Such an integration is the result of self-knowledge and being developed and raised to a very high degree of understanding through many years of unflagging practice that evolves to an effort that is a non-effort, a negative capability, a conscious and intentional letting-be. The experience, essentially timeless and centerless, cannot be willed, and, as it is both beyond and within the time-bound world of centered subject-object experiencing, its recognition is subject to disappearance. Nevertheless, the imprint of no-thingness and nothingness remains. (6)

### Establishing the Sense of 'I Am'

Throughout human history authentic spiritual teachings have pointed the way to transcend the ordinary sense of a separate self or ego and awaken to the true 'I am.' Jacob Needleman speaks of his experience with the Gurdjieff 'Work' in that regard:

Through the help of that teaching, I have understood that God cannot be known or approached beyond a certain point by the ordinary self. The awakening of the true "I am" is necessary; and it is this that has been forgotten. It is this "metaphysical amnesia" that explains why throughout history there is endless conflict and horror, not only with respect to religion but in all aspects of human life. It is this awakening to the "I am," toward which the spiritual teachings of the world have tried to lead man, sometimes from very, very far and through labyrinthine paths of ideas, art, symbolism, manners and customs, and precise ritual forms – and, above all, through the example of the lives and being of men and women who have greatly discovered what and who they are. (7)

In Gurdjieff's teaching the experience of 'I am' is called self-remembering. He taught that human beings have a sacred duty or obligation to awaken the sense of 'I am' or Self from the 'waking sleep' that blankets human life. "His vision of man on earth is of a being created to fulfill a great universal purpose of conscious love and intelligence who instead lives and dies mortally asleep to what he is meant to be."

Most people during their lives are given experiences of what can be called self-remembering, or the experience of *I am* at one or another level. Such experiences are common in childhood, but they can also occur at any time, sometimes simply out of nowhere, and more often during special extreme moments of danger; or joy; or grief; or wonder; or remorse; or deep and sudden loss or disappointment. In such moments a man or woman may come closer to becoming the human being he or she wishes to be – capable of love, compassion, inner peace, intelligence, resourceful action and often uncommon strength. That is, such experiences are like messages from our own real Self. Messages that say: "I am you. Let me enter your life." But rare are the moments when one is given

to understand how to struggle or how to live in a way that makes us, body and soul, available to such experiences. For such experiences, were we to become more available to them, would eventually transform us. In the words of St. Augustine, "God sends the wind, but man must raise the sail." (8)

The first stage of awakening is to see that what we usually believe is our own self is in fact what we are *not*. When this 'false self' is abandoned we have the possibility of reaching a state of silence, stillness and emptiness, from which a new awareness of who we really are arises. "The practice of being aware of the simple, unqualified feeling of 'I' is the way to escape the illusory prison, but this requires the exercise of a different sort of attention than we normally employ in everyday life. When awareness and attention become one the feeling of 'I' itself expands to become one with the whole universe."

The 'I am' is realized only with the perception of *what we are not*. In the nondual path of Advaita Vedanta this is known as *neti neti* ('neither this, nor that'). "From early childhood onwards, we painstakingly construct a 'narrative self,' the story of who we are, based on all the things which have happened to us and how they have affected us and made us the person we now believe ourselves to be. Everything we perceive about ourselves and all the reactions we have to people and events in the outside world, are conditioned by this personal story. Except in rare cases this precious story ignores and entirely forgets our divine origin and it is in fact the story of 'who we are not' – the self-made prison in which we live out our lives, unaware of our true nature." In the words of Maharaj Shantananda Saraswati:

If you begin to be what you are you will realize everything, but to begin to be what you are you must come out of what you are not. You are not those thoughts which are turning, turning in your mind; you are not those changing feelings; you are not the different decisions you make and the different wills and desires you have; you are not that separate ego; well then, what are you? You will find when you come out of what you are not, that the ripple on the water is whispering to you 'I am That,' the birds in the trees are singing to you 'I am That,' the moon and the stars are shining beacons to you – 'I am That': you are in everything in the world and everything in the world is in you since it only exists because it is mirrored in you; and at the same time you are that – everything. (9)

Gurdjieff stressed the importance of the pure feeling of 'I am' and the necessity of being in direct contact with *what is* without any mental or emotional activity, only a sense of physical embodiment and existence. In the words of Jeanne de Salzmann: "To live silence, to know *what is*, I need to come to the sensation of a void, empty of all my imaginary projections. I concentrate on "here . . . now." Solitude from what is imaginary and false is something very great. It means for the first time that I know that 'I am'."

At the heart of the world's spiritual teachings of inner transformation is the emergence of the full sense of 'I am' or 'I exist.' But in order to come to the 'real I' underlying our 'many I's' there must be a harmonious balance between our three functions of sensing, feeling and

thinking – between the outer, inner and abstract worlds. “Each of us has (potentially) a physical being aspect, an emotional being aspect and an intellectual being aspect. Only when the three aspects are blended together consciously, in balanced functioning, can we speak of True Being.” Without this balance and harmony of human functions (body, heart and mind) we are unable to fully understand and participate in the cosmic energies and processes that govern the universe:

The Universe, in its *totality*, simply *is*. Beyond our individual or collective lives, beyond the life of planets, stars or galaxies, independent of any individuated thought, feeling or sensation – the Universe *is*. Within that infinite AM-NESS lies the capacity for all things and all motions, for all interaction and relationship and for all causation and purposes . . . Man’s triune brain is so created that, when it functions *harmonically*, it can resonate with the infinite Will and AM-NESS (the ultimate I AM). Each of his brains is capable of *imaging*, in right ratio and proportion, an aspect of this triune AM-NESS. When the three brains become as *one* (in resonant perception, understanding and manifestation), a human being becomes a “man-without-quotation-marks,” a microcosmic image of the great cosmic exchange of energies. (10)

Gurdjieff taught his students a number of simple exercises to come to the sensation of ‘I am.’ “Again and again, Gurdjieff emphasized how sensing, deeper and deeper, into the physical body is fundamental to our growth. This is an emphasis on the essentiality of descending further and further toward that primary source of the ‘I Am’ – the ground of our Attention and Consciousness.”

Early in group Work we are introduced to ‘sensing the body.’ The effort to direct the attention to some portion, or all, of the physical body is an effort to establish a ‘presence’ (a momentary I AM) into the neural network of the physical body and brain. While all three-brained beings have the capacity to sense the body surface, this is an ‘automatized’ sensing that is an expression of the second state of consciousness, a sensing that depends on external stimulation. The work meaning of sensing involves an intentional, directed attention inward, bringing a *presence* to an ‘automatic’ neural functional expression of the body. For instance, when one *senses* an arm or hand, one is directing the attention on/into a process which is already, and constantly, in motion within the nervous system. One becomes aware of what has been there all of the time. When one *senses* a part of the body in a certain sequence (most sensing exercises involve sequence), one ‘dials in’ to an *ongoing process in the sensory world and demonstrates the degree to which the attention is directed*. (11)

The initial experience of higher states of consciousness often comes from a deeply inquiring search for our ‘true self’ beyond our normal, conditioned self. Advaita Vedanta teacher Jean Klein: “You undertake inquiring when there is discrimination, discernment. But the ego cannot discern: discerning comes from higher reason, from discernment itself, the insight that you are

not the psychosomatic body. Inquiry about life calls for a serious character – it takes a profound seriousness. Be earnest!"

The question "Who am I?" does not come from the mind. Asking "Who am I?" is accompanied by a tremendous energy, you are on fire. I think you can compare it to the condensed energy present when you are very angry or completely joyful. I would say this kind of energy must be there to ask the questions, "Who am I?", "What am I?", "What is life?" Then you have a glimpse of what you are. It is important that you have the glimpse for this is the understanding of the right perspective. Then you live with the right perspective. There is less and less dispersion. Your life becomes more and more oriented. You use all your energy in a completely different way. As your life becomes more oriented you see things differently. Before, you saw things only from the point of view of the I, the me. When you see things from that point of view, you live mechanically in choice, in selection. You may say, "I see it," but you don't really see it, because your seeing is coloured by selection, selection for security, for pleasure, to avoid and so on. But when you have a glimpse of reality, it is already in a certain way in your background. You see things less and less personally. There comes the quality of global vision, where there is no choice, no selection. You see things more and more as they are, not as you wish them to be, but as they really are. You live in this perspective, you love it, it is a jewel you wear, maybe several times a day. Then there comes a moment in your life when even this geometrical representation, the perspective, dissolves in your real nature. And then there is no return. This switchover is absolutely sudden, instantaneous. You live now without anticipation, without end-gaining. You live absolutely in the *now*. Thinking is a practical, useful tool which you use when you need it, but you no longer think when there is no need to think. (12)

### Experiencing the Reality of 'I Am'

Eastern spiritual teachings speak of the *One* universal, eternal Self existing within the innermost consciousness of every human being. "There is only pure Consciousness or the Self, absolute and all-pervading, the source and suchness of everything that arises from moment to moment, utterly prior to this world but not other than this world."

Perhaps you, like most people, feel that you are basically the same person you were yesterday. You probably also feel that you are *fundamentally* the same person you were a year ago. Indeed, you still seem to be the *same* you as far back as you can remember. Put it another way: you never remember a time when you weren't you. In other words, *something* in you seems to remain untouched by the passage of time. But surely your body is not the same as it was even a year ago. Surely also your sensations are different today than in the past. Surely, too, your memories are on the whole different today than a decade ago.

Your mind, your body, your feelings – *all* have changed with time. But something has not changed, and you know that something has not changed. Something feels the same. What is that? There is, in short, something within you – that deep inward sense of I-ness – that is *not* memory, thoughts, mind, body, experience, surroundings, feelings, sensations, or moods. For *all* of these have changed and can change without substantially affecting that inner I-ness. *That* is what remains untouched by the flight of time – and that is the transpersonal witness or Self. (13)

There is a profound difference between the timeless, unchanging presence of pure Consciousness or Awareness and our subjective experiences which are constantly changing: "What you are experiencing is never the same from one moment to the next. Awareness is the permanent background of the flux of experience which witnesses all the changes. It is a presence which is always present *now*."

If you focus your attention on the mystery of the moment you will feel profoundly alive, because you will become acutely conscious of the fact *that you are*. You will recognize something about which you are completely sure. You *exist right now*. This is not an opinion. It is self-evidently true and beyond doubt. It is something you are *knowing* as your eyes pass across this page. There is one thing which is always now. You are always now. But what is this 'you' which is always now? The common sense reply is 'I am a person.' This is certainly what you *appear* to be, but the Gnostics suggest it is not what you *really are*. In this moment you know that you exist. And you also know something else equally obvious and just as profound. You know you are *experiencing* something. If you were not experiencing anything you would be unconscious and you wouldn't know that you exist. So, you know you are *an experiencer of experiences*. You are awareness witnessing a flow of experiences we call 'life.' (14)

The light of attention reveals not only the limitations of the conditioned sense of personal self we must abandon, but also the source of the light itself. The practice of being aware of the simple, unqualified feeling of 'I am' is the path to escape the illusory prison we have created. Maharaj Shantananda Saraswati: "The true feeling of 'I' is related to the *Atman*, and from this feeling can come the aim of service to humanity. But if the feeling of 'I' is connected with the body, the senses or the mind, or anything with which one seems to have become associated, such as one's name, position, profession or knowledge, then all these things when associated with 'I' are the false 'I'."

The witness, the silent, impartial observer, begins to connect with a deeper sense of 'I,' free and unqualified by any object; a simple, bare awareness which contains the essential feeling of 'I' that has always been the same and remains the same from birth to death and even beyond. I am not 'this' or 'that,' but simply 'I am,' witness to the miraculous creation and myself. To begin with this often has a childlike quality, not childish, but child *like* – possessing a wise innocence and a natural capacity for joy and wonder that was often present in childhood – the

same 'I' that is always open to the peak experiences that come and go. This is the first true sense of the divine Self that lives in every person, whatever their nature and qualities. If allowed to take its rightful place as the centre of our being it will concentrate and strengthen, the Conscious light it reflects brightening and expanding to take in the whole universe. (15)

The aim of spiritual work is to lead the aspirant to the discovery of the Self or 'that with which one is born,' a state of pure existence and being which includes 'all that is' in a single, undifferentiated unity. Indian master Sri Anirvân: "The ultimate reality is the great Self, but the energy of this great Self pours into everything and illuminates it in its suchness and complexity." And "You must forget everything. You know only one thing, that you are. You feel deeply that you are. Remember the phrase in the Bible: 'I am that I am.' God consciousness and self-consciousness – both become *one*. They form together one total reality."

The *Katha Upanishad* says: 'The aim is to attain pure Existence (sat).' He who has realized this has a clear understanding of what reality is. Pure Existence is the Truth beyond life and death. That you exist is a fact! And your existence is nothing but a manifestation of that which is universal and transcendental. So your existence becomes oneness in which there exists the two principles of Samkhya: Purusha, which is the spirit, and Prakriti, which is 'that which is manifested.' Spirituality cannot be acquired; it can only be derived from these two principles. Open yourself up to the sun of pure Existence as the bud of a flower opens to the light. Then the Truth will flow into you . . . Now, this pure Existence, lived with a wide-open heart amid all the circumstances of life, is in itself the state of *sahaja* – a state in which the mind is freed from all duality. The motionless mind knows 'That' which has neither beginning nor end, which is free in its very essence. (16)

The Self, timeless and formless, permeates all that exists, bridging and uniting the infinitely rich world of nature and the world of human experience. In the words of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: "The sense 'I am' is the manifestation of a deeper cause, which you may call Self, God, Reality, or by any other name. The 'I am' is in the world, but it is the key that can open the door out of the world."

Primary is the infinite expanse of consciousness, the eternal possibility, the immeasurable potential of all that was, is, and will be. When you look at anything, it is the ultimate you see, but you imagine that you see a cloud or a tree. Learn to look without imagination, to listen without distortion: that is all. Stop attributing names and shapes to the essentially nameless and formless, realize that every mode of perception is subjective, that what is seen or heard, touched or smelt, felt or thought, expected or imagined, is in the mind and not in reality, and you will experience peace and freedom from fear. Even the sense of 'I am' is composed of the pure light and the sense of being. Become aware of that pure light and you will never lose it. The beingness in being, the awareness in

consciousness, the interest in every experience – that is not describable, yet perfectly accessible, for there is nothing else. (17)

Within every human being there is a central point of profound silence and peace, an unchanging, timeless background that is eternally present in the here and now. Jeanne de Salzmann: "To know what 'I am,' my whole being needs to quiet in an act of total attention. When there is no wave, no ripple on the surface, I can see if there is something real in the depths." And "When the chaotic movements of my thoughts and feelings come to a stop a space appears – silence. I feel alive, more alive. I am conscious of being here, of existing, fully and completely. This is a sense of real 'I,' of 'I am'."

In all circumstances I have to be the witness of myself, to withdraw from the mental functioning that gives birth to reactions, and to quiet all ambition, all avidity. Then I can see myself responding to life while something in me, something immobile, does not respond. With this vigilance comes a new valuing. I am touched by a wish, a will, that is the very essence of the feeling of "I" in all its purity. It is a will to be what I am, awakening to my true nature – "I am" and "I Am." With this consciousness there is love. But this love is impersonal, like the sun radiating energy. It illuminates, it creates, it loves. It is attached to nothing and yet draws everything to it. It comes not from "doing" something, from the ego, but from love. It signifies *being* and *becoming*, with an attention that is more and more free. This is the liberation that Gurdjieff speaks of. It is the aim of all schools, all religions. With consciousness I see *what is*, and in the experience "I Am," I open to the divine, the infinite beyond space and time, the higher force that religions call God. My being is Being. To be one, whole in the face of life, is all that matters. So long as I remain conscious of this, I feel a life within me and a peace that nothing else can give. I am here, alive, and around me exists the entire universe. The life that is around me is in me. I feel this universal life, the force of the universe. And I feel myself existing as part of the world that surrounds me. Here everything helps, even the cushion on which I sit. I am present, awakened to what I am. And I see that the most important thing is *to be*. I know it – now – and as I know it, I feel related to everything around me. There is no before, no after, only life itself. I have the impression of emerging from a dream. Everything is real. I feel free, and at peace. In this state, I do not seek. I do not wish, I do not expect anything. There is only what "I am" in this moment. I know now how I am here and why I am here. (18)

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## AWARENESS AND PRESENCE

*'You are the infinite focused in a body. Now you see the body and mind only. Try earnestly and you will come to see the infinite only.'*  
*Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*

### The Light of Attention and Mindfulness

There's an old Zen story: a student said to Master Ichu, "Please write for me something of great wisdom." Master Ichu picked up his brush and wrote one word: "Attention." The student said: "Is that all?" The Master wrote, "Attention, Attention." The student became irritable. "That doesn't seem profound or subtle to me." In response, Master Ichu wrote simply, "Attention, Attention, Attention." In frustration, the student demanded, "What does this word *attention* mean?" Master Ichu replied, "Attention means attention." For *attention*, we could substitute *awareness*. Attention or awareness is the secret of life, and the heart of spiritual practice. (1)

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Awareness – and this is more than mere attentiveness – is everything. A lack of awareness is responsible for so much of the violence and suffering in the world today. For it is the mind that feels itself separated from life and nature, the mind dominated by an omnipresent "I," which lashes out to destroy and kill in order to satisfy its desire for more and more – at whatever cost. This unaware mind breeds insensitivity to people and things, for it doesn't see or appreciate the value of things as they truly are, only seeing them as objects to be used in satiating its own desires. The deeply aware person sees the indivisibility of existence, the rich complexity and inter-relatedness of all life. Out of this awareness grows a deep respect for the absolute value of all things, each thing. From this respect for the worth of every single object, animate as well as inanimate, comes the desire to see things used properly, and not to be heedless, wasteful or destructive. (2)

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Awareness is our true self; it's what we are. So we don't have to try to develop awareness, we simply have to notice how we block awareness, with our thoughts, our fantasies, our opinions, and our judgments. We're either in awareness, which is our natural state, or we're doing something else. When we become open awareness, our ability to do necessary thinking gets sharper, and our whole sensory input becomes brighter, clearer. The world looks brighter, sounds are sharper, and there's a richness of sensory input, which is just our natural state if we are not blocking out our experience with our tense, worrying minds. (3)

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If I realize that what I am is an awareness in relation to my body, in relation to my thoughts, in relation to my emotions, in relation to my actions – then this awareness is not long or short, beautiful or ugly or hot or cold. It is not affected in itself by all the things that affect the body. It is pure being, and the body is the instrument through which that being manifests in life. But I myself am something different from all these manifestations, and it is only because I lose sight of that, that I suffer from the basic existential anxiety about what I am. The moment I equate myself with any of these things, I am on uncertain ground: I am building my house on sand. The only firm foundation on which I can build my house is this experience of pure being. And we have this maybe for a moment, and then we lose it. (4)

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When we cling to thoughts and memories, we are clinging to what cannot be grasped. When we touch these phantoms and let them go, we may discover a place, a break in the chatter, a glimpse of open sky. This is our birthright – the wisdom with which we were born, the vast unfolding display of primordial richness, primordial openness, primordial wisdom itself. All that is necessary then is to rest undistractedly in the immediate present, in this very instant of time. And if we become drawn away by thoughts, by longings, by hopes and fears, again and again we can return to this present moment. We are here. We are carried off as if by the wind, and as if by the wind, we are brought back. When one thought has ended and another has not begun, we can rest in that space. We train in returning to the unchanging heart of this very moment. All compassion and inspiration comes from that. (5)

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Unless there is an open awareness this instant, mind and body function mechanically, habitually, according to ingrained patterns and influences. I cannot possibly respond wholly and appropriately to people and ever-changing situations if there is inattention. Without careful attention, ancient or newly formed patterns of behaviour react immediately and compulsively, and create conflict. When there is the urge to find out what is going on this instant – not just thinking or speculating about it, but looking and listening *directly*, quietly – the energy to attend is there. It needs no special effort or preparation to bring it about. Questioning and insight generate energy! Unnecessary habitual baggage drops when it is uncovered and clearly seen. There is real joy in discovery. (6)

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In our lives we find ourselves involved in all sorts of contradictory situations. Most of the time we don't see this because our attention is absent. When we do see it, the impression is painful. But we must learn to accept this truth. Generally, when we receive an unpleasant impression in life or concerning ourselves, we react. Our reaction carries us away, swallows us. If we do not obey our reaction, we have the possibility of entering into an unusual experience. Instead of plunging into a reactive state, we experience a certain inner freedom. We feel that our attention has remained available, free. It has not, as usual, been stolen from us . . . In acceptance there is a key to something very important that helps us free ourselves from habitual hindrances, helps us to recover the feeling of authentic presence. (7)

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Seeing is not thinking. Seeing is seeing – attending, listening without knowing. If there is no clear awareness of how the human mind-and-body functions from moment to moment, division and conflict continue and multiply. Having an image of oneself and of what one should do or should not do creates duality and has nothing to do with undivided attention to what is actually taking place. Attention comes from nowhere. It has no cause. It belongs to no one. When it functions effortlessly, there is no duality. Without attention, one lives in words, images, and memories of oneself and others, constantly in the grip of fear, anger, ambition, confusion. (8)

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You live, you feel, you think. By giving attention to your living, feeling and thinking, you free yourself from them and go beyond them. Your personality dissolves and only the witness remains. Then you go beyond the witness. Do not ask how it happens. Just search within yourself.

Q: What marks the difference between the person and the witness?

A: Both are modes of consciousness. In one you desire and fear, in the other you are unaffected by pleasure and pain and are not ruffled by events. You let them come and go. (9)

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When we recognize the conventional nature of the self, and intuitively we see its unreality, then we free ourselves from the grip of time-based emotions like guilt, resentment, worry, and fear. These imagined limits, and the measuring of life by

expected life span, fall away as we re-enter the flow of the timeless. We realize that the past, present and future are all contained in this instant and have no existence apart from it. Our palpable sense of their reality arises from thought, from our remarkable ability to remember previous events. What we overlook is the fact that memories of those events only exist in the present moment. (10)

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To "stop" is to stop searching for yourself in thoughts, emotions, circumstances, or bodily images. It is that simple. The search is over when you realize that the true and lasting fulfillment you have been searching for is found to be nowhere other than right where you are. It is *here*. It is in you, it is in me, it is in all life, both sentient and insentient. It is everywhere. As long as you are searching for it, it cannot be found because you assume that *it is* somewhere else. You are continually chasing a lie. The truth of who you are is utterly simple: it is closer than your thoughts, closer than your heartbeat, closer than your breath. If you believe your thoughts to be real, if you follow your thoughts as the basis of reality, you will continually overlook what is closer, what has been calling you throughout time, saying, "You are here! You are home! Come in. Be at home." To be home is to simply *be here*. (11)

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Living in the Now means to be where you are, going with the flow of life without dualistic divisions of any kind, no longer separating experience into past and future, nor being drawn by memory or anticipation away from the present moment. To say that there is no time, or that time is an illusion, is not to deny its usefulness in its conventional role. Instead, it is to see it for what it is: a social agreement on a system of arbitrary divisions superimposed on the flow of life to coordinate our human activities. When the mind is still and the din of thoughts has calmed, there is no experience of time or concern for it. The kaleidoscope of inestimable detail that forever awaits our attention, the rich tapestry of our moment-to-moment experience of life to which we have ready access, has no need for time's generic categories and classifications. Most of us, in quiet moments of solitude or immersed in activities we love, have experienced this timelessness and tasted the essence of what is. (12)

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Since ancient times, spiritual masters of all traditions have pointed to the Now as the key to the spiritual dimension. The whole essence of Zen consists in walking along the razor's edge of Now – to be so utterly, so completely *present* that no problem, no suffering, nothing that is not *who you are* in your essence, can survive in you. In the now, in the absence of time, all your problems dissolve. Suffering needs time, it cannot survive in the Now. The great Zen master Rinzai, in order to

take his students' attention away from time, would often raise his finger and ask: "What at this moment is lacking?" A powerful question that does not require an answer on the level of the mind. It is designed to take your attention deeply into the Now. A similar question in the Zen tradition is this: "If not now, when?" The Now is also central to the teaching of Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam. Sufis have a saying: "The Sufi is the son of time present." And Rumi, the great poet and teacher of Sufism, declares: "Past and future veil God from our sight; burn up both of them with fire." Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth century spiritual teacher, summed it up beautifully: "Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time. (13)

### Pure Awareness and Consciousness

The truth of who you are is consciousness, not your name, not your body, not your emotions, and not your thoughts. These are just coverings that come and go. They have a birth, an existence in time, and a death. Consciousness does not come and go. It is here now. It knows no other time. Consciousness is free. It is not bound by any name or concept. It is not limited by notions of time and space. It is not affected by emotions or disease. You are pure consciousness. You have always been free, for you have always been consciousness. You have experienced yourself as a point in consciousness and from that imagined yourself to be limited to a body. This recognition, even if it lasts only an instant, is the beginning of an infinitely deepening self-investigation. It is the end of preconception with the cycles of self-definition, and the beginning of a true self-exploration that knows no limits. (14)

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What we ordinarily think of as the self has many aspects. There is the thinking self, the emotional self, and the functional self which does things. These together comprise our describable self. There is, however, another aspect of ourselves that we slowly get in touch with as we spiritually mature: *the observing self*. All the describable parts of what we call ourselves are limited. They are also linear; they come and go within a framework of time. But the observing self cannot be put in that category, no matter how hard we try. That which observes cannot be found and cannot be described. If we look for it there is nothing there. Since there is nothing we can know about it, we can almost say it is another dimension. (15)

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Do not undervalue attention. It means interest and also love. To know, to do, to discover, or to create you must give your heart to it – which means attention. All the blessings flow from it.

Q: You advise us to concentrate on 'I am.' Is this too a form of attention?

A: What else? Give your undivided attention to the most important in your life – yourself. Of your personal universe you are the center – without knowing the center what else can you know? (16)

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It takes a long time to come to unfurnished attention, an attention which is completely open without expectation and memory. The mind is a complicated jigsaw puzzle. There are many little pieces with which you build up your landscape. When you see how the mind functions in repetition you will lose interest in building the picture yet again! Every situation has its own puzzle which is much more entrancing than the same old one you live in. Observe, be alert, and you will see more than you know. (17)

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It is clear that the real meaning of the life of each one of us is to live in the present moment. This can only be experienced if we try. To sense, to experience, second after second, the present: *here, now* – this "now" that we never perceive. And yet it is to this reality that we must open ourselves again and again. Experience shows us that it is difficult, nearly impossible, to stay there. Our inner capacity is limited. To be more able, we must become freer in ourselves. It is not a question of a more or less longer duration but rather of the quality of our inner lives. This quality is the bread of truth we need. It is not possible for us to know divine truth before we know the truth that immediately concerns us. (18)

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Living in the now is a natural practice, because the present moment is the natural state. We're always in the now, even if we don't totally know it. If we are remembering the past, where does that take place except in the now through present awareness? If we are thinking about the future, we are doing our planning and thinking now. We are always in the present no matter how scattered and distracted we may be. Returning to the now and maintaining that awareness is like coming home to ourselves. Of course, just as we've never been anyone else, we've never been anywhere else. But we lose touch, and we forget. Yet it's always now. This is our sane sanctuary in time called right now. It's where we really are no matter what stories we are telling ourselves. That's why it is such a relief to simply rest in the present, just as we are. Opening up to the miracle of the present moment is a gift we give ourselves. (19)

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Whatever changes is not your Self; this body is continuously changing. It was not there, it appeared and it will disappear. It is not you. Find out what you are. The important thing is the consciousness. You must give your full attention to the consciousness itself. That is the process of meditation; then all the secrets will be revealed to you by the consciousness. Watching yourself, that itself is meditation. To keep only consciousness, without mixing it with anything, that is knowledge without words, that you ARE. Thoughts will be there, but they will be weaker and weaker, so only the feeling of "I Amness" will remain, just consciousness without any activity. Watching your activities is on a lower level, like watching anger, etc., that is still identification with the mind-body. Consciousness is beyond both. (20)

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When you have had your first few glimpses of the timeless state of consciousness, you begin to move back and forth between the dimensions of time and presence. First you become aware of just how rarely your attention is truly in the Now. But to know that you are *not* present is a great success: that knowing is presence – even if initially it only lasts for a couple of seconds of clock time before it is lost again. Then, with increasing frequency, you *choose* to have the focus of your consciousness in the present moment rather than the past or future, and whenever you realize that you had lost the Now, you are able to stay in it not just for a couple of seconds, but for longer periods as perceived from the external perspective of clock time. So before you are firmly established in the state of presence, you shift back and forth for a while between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the state of presence and the state of mind-identification. You lose the Now, and you return to it, again and again. Eventually, presence becomes your predominant state. (21)

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In moments of greater attention, I have an awareness of "being here" – a look, a light, a consciousness that knows. Consciousness is here. I cannot doubt it. And yet I do not trust it, I do not feel it as "I," as my essential nature. I believe that I can look for consciousness, see consciousness, know it. We take consciousness as an object of observation. But we cannot see consciousness. It is consciousness that sees and that knows . . . So, the only reality for me today is in my effort to be present to myself. Nothing else is real. Everything is distorted by the veil of my mind, which prevents me from being in contact with the nature of things. I must first go toward my own nature, awake to the consciousness of "I," and be attentive only to this. Consciousness is always consciousness of self. We can call the Self whatever we wish – the seat of consciousness, even God. The point is that it is the center, the very core of our being, without which there is nothing. (22)

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Presence is our constant nature but most of the time we are interrupting it by living in a state of expectation, motivation or interpretation. We are hardly ever at home. In order to rediscover our freedom we need to let go of these projects and allow the possibility of presence. Its real discovery, or our access to it, can only be made within the essence of what is. This is where spontaneous aliveness resides and where we can openly welcome the unknown. Only here, in present awareness of simply what is, can there be freedom from self-image. To live passionately is to let go of everything for the wonder of timeless presence . . . Presence is a quality of welcoming, open awareness which is dedicated to simply what is. There can still be someone who is aware and there is that of which they are conscious -- the sound of running water, the taste of tea, the feeling of fear, or the weight and texture of sitting on a seat. And then there can be a letting go of the one who is aware, and all that remains is presence. There is simply what is. (23)

### Opening to the Wonder of Life

Be satisfied with watching the flow of your life; if your watching is deep and steady, ever turned towards the source, it will gradually move upstream till it suddenly becomes the source. Put your awareness to work, not your mind. The mind is not the instrument for this task. The timeless can be reached only by the timeless. Your body and mind are both subject to time, only awareness is timeless, ever in the now. In awareness you are facing facts and reality is fond of facts. (24)

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Q: How can I come to greater alertness?

A: It is a question of being interested when you look at and listen to things. When you begin looking and listening you will start discovering and you will enjoy the discoveries. You will see that every situation, every moment in life, is a fathomless sack. But you make it a sack with a bottom and put things in it. The moment you see that each situation is bottomless, much richer, much more alive than anything you have accumulated in your memory, then you spontaneously become more interested in life. (25)

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So long as we are full of the ordinary turmoil – the thoughts, the feelings, the emotions, and so forth – that fill our inner life, there is no room to receive some-

thing from a higher source. It is only by quieting this turmoil, by making room, that there is space enough left to receive. It is not a question of attaining something, achieving something, grasping something. So often, with every good intention, we make some kind of effort to grasp something, and this is not the right effort to make. The effort is to be open, to be receptive, to be empty. This silence we experience together or by ourselves – this is not an empty silence. But as we know, it is filled with life. And beyond that, the Void, the big emptiness if you like . . . We are, as it were, a tiny drop in the ocean of this emptiness. You see, to make ourselves empty, then the dewdrop is received into the ocean. (26)

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The quality of influences that reaches me depends on the quality of my Presence. And the quality of my Presence depends on the relation of my thought, my feeling and my sensation. In order to be attuned to a more subtle force, the attention of each part needs to concentrate, to become charged with a new meaning and power to relate voluntarily. In this way the thinking purifies itself, as do the feeling and the sensation. Each plays its own role and functions in concert with the others for the same goal of being attuned with a more subtle Presence. This Presence needs to shine, to animate my body. It has an intelligence, a vision that is like a light in the darkness and thickness of my sleep. As I am today, directed by my ego, I cannot know the very essence of my Being. I am not prepared for this. A greater abandon, a greater magnetization toward my real "I," toward my "divine" nature, must take place. I feel the need for it, and I awaken to this wish, this life. I feel this intelligence awaken. (27)

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The whole secret lies in the control of attention. In our ordinary state attention is occupied with the content of consciousness – impressions, memories, and associations – and it is so used to this that, at the beginning, it takes everything we've got to withdraw attention from the usual contents, symbolized by the horizontal member of the cross, and direct it in the other direction, symbolized by the vertical member. But with practice one can learn to divide attention in two: one part directed onto one's activities, and the other simultaneously directed in this other dimension. Then one is able to be aware at the same time of the ordinary contents of consciousness which fill the inner receptive space and of the emptiness behind it, which can then receive other kinds of impressions which do not come in through the ordinary senses. And it is this state which is called "living in the presence of God." (28)

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What's going on in me right now? Coming into awareness leads to a sense of presence. Although we typically rush through our day in little contact with the reality of our inner life, daily practice to connect to a deeper sense of Self could transform the outer tasks that press on us so urgently. Then the ordinary work we often consider a grind might take on the quality of a ritual. There is, in fact, no ordinary life. There is only an *extraordinary* one – the one we were given. Daily practice, the practice of presence, can give us the help we need to remember that. (29)

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When there is presence there is total intimacy and the senses are heightened to a degree previously unrecognized. I see and touch in innocence, I taste and smell for the first time, and hear a new sound that is vital, fresh and unknown. There is a subtle feeling of risk and serenity in presence. It is the first and last step. It moves beyond time and self-identity and provides the ground in which the discovery of what I am is made immediately and directly available. When there is presence, all that is illusory falls away, and what is left is real, vital and passionately alive. Life full on – not my life, not anyone's life, but simply life. Presence does not bring heaven down to earth or raise earth up to heaven. All is one. (30)

## Meditations

When we deeply relax, our attention unglues itself little by little from our pre-occupations, our identifications. It moves toward the realm of silence. During this experience of inner silence, if thoughts appear, they pass as if upon a screen. Our emotions are short-lived movements that do not carry us toward externals.

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The exercise of pure attention implies the complete elimination of all elements from the past, thus allowing the authentic purity of the present to be completely grasped. This entails a state of complete receptivity which seizes and is open to the complete, eternal and perfect newness of each moment.

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There is a clear distinction between consciousness itself and the transient states which arise within it. All experiences are merely conditioned states. We take them for real, when in fact they are just transient. Turn your attention to consciousness itself and become a witness to this truth.

\*

Ultimately you will realize that you are not your thoughts, your mind, your body, or any other object, but behind all of these is a still, constant, seeming nothingness from which everything emanates; this is what you are.

\*

Just discover that you aren't "living" a life, you *are* life. It's flowing through you – just see it arising and falling away. Emotions and thoughts arise and fall away. They are not you. You are the awareness that allows them and everything else to be.

\*

The silent Witness pays attention to what goes on in the centers: to what goes on in the head, to what goes on in the heart, to what goes on in the body. It simply pays attention. It's like listening to music. You don't have to manipulate the impressions you receive from music; you just receive them.

\*

The witness is always present, is always presence. It is that which is not identified with change, with circumstances, and therefore "observes" them. It is this continual sense of presence throughout life that we call the witness. To know the witness, therefore, means to experience timeless presence in all change.

\*

Just as each flower has its own colour, but all colours are caused by the same light, so do many experiences appear in the undivided and indivisible awareness, each separate in memory, identical in essence. This essence is the root, the foundation, the timeless and spaceless 'possibility' of all experience.

\*

You are free. You are whole. You are endless. There is no bottom to you, no boundary to you. You are awareness and awareness *is* consciousness.

\*

It is possible, right now, wherever you find yourself to stop. For this moment at least, turn your attention to where your life comes from. Shift your attention back to your life's source, to what gives your life the power to be aware, and to where your life goes when it is finished.

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The field of consciousness has no boundary. This vast, undivided awareness is available to us at all times. It is there at any moment we are still.

\*

There is only consciousness – this infinite unknown, this vast emptiness into which everything arises. You and I are not separate from this. We *are* this consciousness, this wide-open infinite unknown. ‘Your’ awareness, ‘my’ awareness, everyone’s awareness – all are the Same Awareness. And it has no limits. It contains everything and it *is* everything.

\*

Awareness is the source of all. As the matrix of everything, it is completely still, silent, and impersonal. It has no relationship with anything; it’s the singularity from which everything emanates.

\*

There is simply awareness – silent, still, impersonal awareness – and whatever seems to be happening is arising in that. Just be the watcher. You *are* the stillness, you *are* the silence in which everything arises. Embrace that which never moves and is totally still.

\*

Pure awareness is a natural state of timelessness, because experience is always now, here and now. Whether you think you experience things in the past or anticipate possibilities in the future, all that – memories of the past or anticipation of the future – is happening now.

\*

Our natural state of being is awareness, an awareness which is not *of* anything, but which is an all-encompassing state of pure experience. Within awareness our minds are balanced, light, free and flexible.

\*

This is the miracle of awareness: it gives birth to intelligence and compassionate action. Awareness does not judge, condemn or accept, because it has no *me*-ness to be defended or nurtured. In the wonder of clear seeing, *me*-ness is in abeyance, leaving infinite room for love.

Awareness, which is the source of all, is also the source of unconditional love. So *everything* is divine, everything comes from awareness, from unconditional love. Everything is the beloved, so wherever your awareness rests, it rests on the beloved.

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The awakened state is our natural state and way of being. When awakening happens, we suddenly realize that we've come back home to how we naturally are, which is actually quite ordinary. It's wonderful to experience the magnificence of the ordinary.

\*

The expression of love is life itself. The wholeness of life is everywhere and is everything. We are already immersed in life and life in us.

\*

The human being is what links consciousness to its own infinite expressions in form. Through the form of an awake human being consciousness becomes conscious of itself as both formless and as all forms. That is why, to the true sage, everything is divine, whole and complete. Everything is God, the Self.

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If we can experience the moment we're in, we discover that it is unique, precious and completely fresh. It never happens twice. One can appreciate and celebrate each moment – there's nothing more sacred.

\*

Be present to the experience of life itself. Cultivate attention in everything you do, and, until your last breath, live in the mystery of being.

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You realize your identity with all of life in an extraordinary, mysterious, astounding, and wonderful way, something humbling, incomprehensible, and breathtaking. Life goes on as it always has, but you watch it unfold with new eyes.

\*

In the end you reach a state of non-grasping, of joyful non-attachment, of inner ease and freedom, indescribable, yet wonderfully real.

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## SELF-REMEMBERING

*'You do not remember yourselves. You do not feel yourselves, you are not conscious of yourselves. You do not feel: I observe, I feel, I see.'*

*G.I Gurdjieff*

### Nature of Self-Remembering

The term *self-remembering* is sometimes referred to as “self-presence” or “self-consciousness.” The practice of self-remembering has been called the ‘master key’ to Gurdjieff’s teaching. In the words of his student Henri Tracol: “It is the Alpha and Omega, the threshold that must be passed at the outset and crossed and re-crossed time and again.”

Gurdjieff once provided a succinct description of self-remembering: “To know you are angry when you are angry.” Self-remembering is a direct feeling or sensing of one’s aliveness in the present moment – a state of consciousness in which a person is aware of their own presence and being: *I, here, now*. In the words of Henri Thomasson: “To remember myself is to submit myself to the effort which brings me to the concrete sensation of existing in the present moment: ‘I, wholly here, where I am, present’.” Self-remembering is an experience of coming back to ourselves by opening to the reality of the present moment:

Only when we succeed in gathering our attention and relaxing does our body become capable of opening. If these inner conditions are brought together and maintained for a certain time, a true feeling – without words, without images – can appear for a few moments within ourselves. At the moment of this experience, which is like no other, we sense a new vibration that transmits the taste of a more secret, more subtle life. We realize, then, that the capacity to *be there* has been given us. Habitually, we are everywhere but there, in ourselves. In our ordinary state, we are sometimes in the past, sometimes in the future, but rarely in the present and at home. (1)

According to Gurdjieff self-remembering is a state of consciousness in which human beings are simultaneously aware of both themselves and their actions:

Self-consciousness is the moment when a man is aware both of himself and of his machine. We have it in flashes, but only in flashes. There are moments when you become aware not only of what you are doing but also of yourself doing it. You see both ‘I’ and the ‘here’ of ‘I am here’ – both the anger and the ‘I’ that is angry. Call this self-remembering, if you like. Now when you are fully and always aware of the ‘I’ and what it is doing, you become conscious of yourself. (2)

The possibility of remembering ourselves, being attentive to ourselves, is always present. Self-remembering seeks to create a correspondence between the inner and outer worlds of each human being: "Self-remembering is the *expansion* of the field of consciousness so that both the outside and the inside worlds are perceived together in the unity of experience." P.D. Ouspensky spoke of the division of attention which is the characteristic feature of self-remembering:

When I observe something, my attention is directed towards what I observe – a line with one arrowhead. When at the same time, I try to remember myself, my attention is directed both towards the object observed and towards myself. A second arrowhead appears on the line. Having defined this I saw that the problem consisted in directing attention on oneself without weakening or obliterating the attention directed on something else. Moreover, this "something else" could as well be within one as outside me. (3)

Self-remembering is an inner process of conscious attention which "allows us to take in impressions directly, unfiltered . . . we consciously receive and digest impressions, rather than simply react to them."

Self-remembering is simply a relocation and redistribution of one's attention. Thus, one becomes embodied. In doing so, the attention is freed and elaborated and a new quality emerges. That quality separates one from their state. From this separateness, the state and its manifestations are observed. If there is identification with the observation, then the separateness is lost. One becomes their state again or a successive state. That is, they are absorbed back into the program. But whatever has been observed has been truly seen without buffers or filters. One's intelligence has been awakened to itself. (4)

Vivid experiences of self-remembering occur naturally at certain times in the lives of many people, especially in childhood. "Certain memories of childhood, full of color and flavor, are moments of self-remembering – unforgettable because they connect our deeper inner world with what is happening to us and around us. Such impressions are as alive now as they were then, no matter how long ago they took place."

I realized that moments of self-remembering do occur in life, though rarely. Only the deliberate production of these moments created the sensation of novelty. Actually I had been familiar with them from early childhood. They came in either new or unexpected surroundings, in a new place, among new people while travelling, for instance, when suddenly one looks about one and says: *How strange! I and in this place;* or in very emotional moments, in moments of danger, in moments when it is necessary to keep one's head, when one hears one's own voice and sees and observes oneself from the outside. I saw quite clearly that my first recollections of life, in my own case very early ones, were moments of *self-remembering.* This last realization revealed much else to me. That is, I saw that

I really only remember those moments of the past in which *I remembered myself*. Of the others *I knew only that they took place*. I am not able wholly to revive them, to experience them again. But the moments when I had remembered myself were alive and were in no way different from the present. (5)

The consequences of the lack of self-remembering and conscious awareness in our lives are immense:

Self-observation brings a man to the realization of the fact that he does not remember himself. Man's inability to remember himself is one of the chief and most characteristic features of his being and the cause of everything else in him. The inability to remember oneself finds expression in many ways. A man does not remember his decisions, he does not remember the promises he has made to himself, does not remember what he said or felt a month, a week, a day, or even an hour ago. He begins work of some kind and after a certain lapse of time he does not remember *why* he began it. It is especially in connection with work on oneself that this happens particularly often . . . Speaking in general one can say truthfully that if a man remembers one thing he forgets ten other things which are much more important for him to remember. (6)

### Difficulties and Challenges

Many of Gurdjieff's students, such as P.D. Ouspensky, reported how difficult it was "to remember myself, or to be conscious of myself, to say to myself */ am walking, / am doing, and continually to feel this /.*"

The very first attempts showed me how difficult it was. Attempts at self-remembering failed to give any results except to show me that in actual fact we never remember ourselves. "What else do you want?" said G. "This is a very important realization. People who *know this* (he emphasized these words) already know a great deal. The whole trouble is that nobody knows it. If you ask a man whether he can remember himself, he will of course answer that he can. If you tell him that he cannot remember himself, he will either be angry with you, or he will think you an utter fool. The whole of life is based on this, the whole of human existence, the whole of human blindness. If a man really knows that he cannot remember himself, he is already near to the understanding of his being." (7)

In actual fact, it is very difficult to remember oneself. In a memorable passage from *In Search of the Miraculous*, Ouspensky describes how hard it is to maintain a continuous state of self-remembering for more than a brief period of time:

I was once walking along the Liteiny towards the Nevsky, and in spite of all my efforts I was unable to keep my attention on self-remembering. The noise, movement, everything distracted me. Every minute I lost the thread of attention, found it again, and then lost it again. At last I felt a kind of ridiculous irritation with myself and I turned into the street on the left having firmly decided to keep my attention on the fact that *I would remember myself* at least for some time, at any rate until I reached the following street. I reached the Nadejdinskaya without losing the thread of attention except, perhaps, for short moments. Then I again turned towards the Nevsky realizing that, in quiet streets, it was easier for me not to lose the line of thought and wishing therefore to test myself in more noisy streets. I reached the Nevsky still remembering myself, and was already beginning to experience the strange emotional state of inner peace and confidence which comes after great efforts of this kind. Just around the corner on the Nevsky was a tobacconist's shop where they made my cigarettes. Still remembering myself I thought I would call there and order some cigarettes.

Two hours later I *woke up* in the Tavricheskaya, that is, far away. I was going by *izvostchik* to the printers. The sensation of awakening was extraordinarily vivid. I can almost say that *I came to*. I remembered everything at once. How I had been walking along the Nadejdinskaya, how I had been remembering myself, how I had thought about cigarettes, and how at this thought I seemed to fall and disappear into a deep sleep. At the same time, while immersed in this sleep, I had continued to perform consistent and expedient actions. I left the tobacconist, called at my flat in the Liteiny, telephoned to the printers. I wrote two letters. Then again I went out of the house . . . And on the way while driving along the Tavricheskaya I began to feel a strange uneasiness, as though I had forgotten something. *And I suddenly remembered that I had forgotten to remember myself.* (8)

In his teachings, Gurdjieff constantly stressed the difficulty of remembering oneself for more than a short period of time and the consequences of this fact for the ability to observe oneself objectively:

Not one of you has noticed that *you do not remember yourselves*. You do not feel *yourselves*; you are not conscious of *yourselves*. With you, 'it observes' just as 'it speaks,' 'it thinks,' 'it laughs.' You do not feel: *I observe, I notice, I see . . .* In order to really observe oneself one must first of all *remember oneself*. (He emphasized these words). Try to *remember yourselves* when you observe yourselves and later on tell me the results. Only those results will have any value that are accompanied by self-remembering. Otherwise you yourself do not exist in your observations. In which case what are all your observations worth? (9)

Self-remembering requires a sustained effort in order to overcome the draw of external events, forces and circumstances. "We are the slave of the outer world. It is difficult for us to listen to our essential, more intelligent wish, and difficult to return to it. The confrontation of these two movements produces the spark of self-remembering."

Despite a good theoretical understanding of what is at stake, our remembering is weak and almost instantly disappears as soon as there is contact with external facts and events. To live a more persistent remembering is possible only if we accept to see the ease with which we try to escape this return to ourselves. We must ceaselessly remember this state of affairs and recover the meaning and direction of the search. Self-remembering is immense. It has many degrees. We are never fully capable of appreciating a moment of remembering. We still do not have enough vigilance of thought, openness of feeling. Yet even in our habitual life circumstances, which seem unfavorable to remembering, it is possible to recover the confidence that helps us experience an inner vibration of an entirely different nature. After a certain period of sincere work, we are led to recognize that the vibrations of the external world can serve as reminding factors. We need to exercise, to try each day to remember ourselves when we are in contact with something or someone. If we truly try, the work in us will remain alive. (10)

The primary barrier to self-remembering is *identification* with our thoughts, feelings and sensations: "To exercise any free will at all, our consciousness has to rise above the mechanical level. We have to raise our heads above the parapet of identification and automatic response."

This is the beginning of 'Self-remembering' which starts as a simple awareness of myself being here, now, in this moment. Here and now is the only possible starting place. We possess no other moments, the past is gone and the future is yet to arrive. No action or thought or anything else can take place anywhere else but now. As soon as the mind strays into the past or the future we become automatons. Most of life is lived in this condition, the mind, the emotions and the body all reacting automatically to the continuous driving belt of influences and impressions that make everything just happen. Being present in the moment is the beginning of 'waking up' which makes it possible to observe what we're doing, feeling and thinking *now*; so it is obvious that any exercise of free will must start here. What happens then, of course, is that we immediately become identified with whatever we're observing, the present moment slips away and we're back in the usual automatic state without even noticing that it's happened. Everyone has an individual and habitual 'set of impressions' arising either from the body, the emotions or the mind, that cause us imperceptibly to lose the state of self-awareness – and this is often connected to the 'chief feature' of our personality. The way to avoid this trap is to become determined merely to *witness* what's going on, inside and outside of ourselves, whatever it is, with complete and uncaring impartiality. As soon as we like or dislike what we see, have any opinion about it or make any judgmental response at all, identification is instantly up and running again. (11)

In order to remember ourselves we need to overcome the passivity and weakness of our attention and cultivate a finer level of attention. Self-remembering counters the force of

identification with our thoughts, feelings and perceptions. "If my force of attention is entirely taken, I am lost in life, identified, asleep. All my capacity to be present is lost."

Our effort must always be clear – to be present, that is, to begin to remember myself. With the attention divided, I am present in two directions, as present as I can be. My attention is engaged in two opposite directions, and I am at the center. This is the act of self-remembering. I wish to keep part of my attention on the awareness of belonging to a higher level and, under this influence, try to open to the outer world. I must make an effort to remain related, an effort of attention. I try to know truly what I am. I struggle to stay present, at the same time with a feeling of "I" turned toward a better quality and with an ordinary feeling tied to my self, my person. I wish to see and not forget that I belong to these two levels. (12)

### Engagement of Intellect, Emotions and Body

The process of self-remembering, although intellectually quite understandable, is in actual practice very difficult due to the complexity of the organization of the human 'machine.' "When we say 'remember yourself,' we mean yourself. But we ourselves are – my feelings, my body, my sensations, my mind. Our mind is not us – it is merely a small part of us."

I wish to remember myself as long as possible. But I have proved to myself that I very quickly forget the task I set myself, because my mind has very few associations connected with it. I have noticed that other associations engulf the associations connected with self-remembering . . . If the thinking center produces associations of self-remembering, incoming associations of another character, which come from other parts and have nothing to do with self-remembering, absorb these desirable associations, since they come from many different places and so are more numerous. And so I sit here. My problem is to bring my other parts to a point where my thinking center would be able to prolong the state of self-remembering as much as possible, without exhausting the energy immediately. (13)

Self-remembering requires the simultaneous attention of all aspects of the human being to be truly effective. Gurdjieff taught that proper self-remembering is a conscious effort involving all our functions -- body, mind and feelings. "A moment of self-remembering is a moment of consciousness, that is, of self-consciousness – not in the ordinary sense, but a consciousness of the real Self, which is "I," together with an awareness of the organism – the body, the feeling and thought."

A man cannot remember himself because he tries to do so with his mind – at least in the beginning. Self-remembering begins with self-sensing. It must be done through the instinctive-moving center and the emotional center. Mind alone does not constitute a human being. The center of gravity of change is in

the moving and emotional centers, but these are concerned only with the present; the mind looks ahead. The wish to change, to be what one ought to be, must be in our emotional center, and the ability to *do* in our body. The feelings may be strong, but the body is lazy, sunk in inertia. Mind must learn the language of the body and feelings, and this is done by correct observation of self. One of the benefits of self-remembering is that one has the possibility of making fewer mistakes in life. But for complete self-remembering all the centers must work simultaneously. (14)

Self-remembering requires a global attention that is simultaneously aware of body, mind and feelings. “Only when there is self-awareness do we experience the world and ourselves in the world. Then, we viscerally sense, feel and know – *simultaneously*. ”

To have consciousness of self is not only to be aware of oneself mentally (in which case it would be only the mind looking at the mind), but also physically and emotionally; that is a global awareness . . . this demands a certain quality and strength of attention, of a direct recognition of the *immediate*, of what-is, of having an awareness that is global in reference to oneself. Consciousness of self is a state predicated on self-remembering – a conscious awareness of the body, of being embodied, of being connected with what is happening internally, as well as what is happening externally. (15)

Gurdjieff prescribed certain exercises and tasks for his students to enhance the effort of self-remembering. Some were simple, such as being present at the first mouthful of food or when opening a door; others were more complex involving directing attention simultaneously to the physical, emotional and thinking functions (e.g., the Movements):

Gurdjieff introduced many exercises and tasks that focused on establishing a separated presence (*via directed attention*) in one, two or all three centers. Sensing exercises assist the establishment of a separated presence in the physical body (in a part or in the whole); exercises that focus on the breath and on the feeling world of relationships aim to establish a presence in the higher being body [‘Kesdjan’]; other tasks and exercises challenge the intellect, for example, through pondering or studying of the laws. Some exercises evoke efforts in more than one center, pre-eminent among them being the efforts demanded by certain of the sacred dances and movements. A separate type of effort is encompassed by the expression “self-observation.” The primary objective here is to see, impartially from an inner separated presence or ‘observer,’ the ‘man-machine’ (the automaton) in the process of its manifestation (in thoughts, feelings and sensations). As the strength of the separated attention grows, the past forces that have blended the ‘little I’s’ into their automatic manifestations weaken. Some of these little I’s simply disappear over time, so weakened by the continual effort of directing our attention that they no longer can manifest. Many I’s, however, have egoism at their core and they become, over time, the object of the true transformation of negative emotions.

(16)

## Levels and Degrees of Self-Remembering

Self-remembering has multiple stages and qualities. “Remembering oneself admits of an infinite number of approaches. It can be looked at from many and varied angles, it has certain definite degrees and stages and there is always more in it than we can ever grasp.”

Self-remembering is not monolithic; it is a range of states, and itself includes many levels, for it admits of varying degrees of intensity, and opens into different dimensions of time. It commences, as it always must, with a vivid sense of the present, but there are states where the past is included, and one senses one’s own life as a whole, or at least as more in the direction of the whole. Being present to the moment and to oneself as one is in time, the future is also included, in some ineffable way. Every true feeling, as opposed to ephemeral emotions, is a feeling of myself in a particular moment. No true feeling is ever divorced from self-remembering. But the intellectual and religious or spiritual feelings are the finest. They are the most identical in themselves to the range of states in which I remember myself, more or less completely. We know how the conscious receipt of an impression or sensation can bring a sense of being. But the conscious receipt of an impression of feeling or mental action is far finer and brings a sense of being of a different order altogether. (17)

Self-remembering with its different levels or degrees develops with practice. “There are two types of self-remembering. The first is mental, the thought arises to remember oneself. After a long time of repeated practice of obeying this reminder to redirect the attention into the body, the second may emerge, an organic and spontaneous experiencing, one in which ‘I am remembered’.”

It should be pointed out that self-remembering, however full and whole, can be of two kinds, conscious and mechanical – remembering oneself consciously and remembering oneself by associations. Mechanical, that is, associative self-remembering can bring no essential profit, yet such associative self-remembering is of tremendous value at the beginning. Later it should not be used, for such a self-remembering, however complete, does not result in any real, concrete doing. But in the beginning it too is necessary. There exists another, a conscious self-remembering which is not mechanical. (18)

Self-consciousness or awareness of oneself is not a constant state, but varies in quality and potentiality. There are definite levels and stages of self-remembering. Although the ability to remember oneself is our birthright, it needs first to be discovered and then carefully cultivated. “Self-remembering itself is a journey with many stages. Every step along our way is marked by a new experience of the feeling of ‘I.’ It isn’t until we arrive at the experience which answers for us in a direct experiential fashion the question, *Who am I?*, that we plumb the depths of this self-remembering.”

By observing in yourself the appearance and disappearance of consciousness you will inevitably see one fact which you neither see nor acknowledge now, and that is that moments of consciousness are very short and are separated by long intervals of completely unconscious, mechanical working of the machine. You will then see that you can think, feel, act, speak, work, *without being conscious of it*. And if you learn to see in yourselves the moments of consciousness and the long periods of mechanicalness, you will as infallibly see in other people when they are conscious of what they are doing and when they are not. Your principal mistake consists in thinking that you *always have consciousness*, and in general, either that consciousness is *always present* or that it is *never present*. In reality consciousness is a property which is continually changing. Now it is present, now it is not present. And there are different degrees and different levels of consciousness. Both consciousness and the different degrees of consciousness must be understood in oneself by sensation, by taste. It is necessary to distinguish *consciousness* from the *possibility of consciousness*. We have only the possibility of consciousness and rare flashes of it. (19)

Self-observation and a degree of self-knowledge depend on the creation of a stable state of self-remembering. "As long as a man cannot remember himself, things happen to him or because of him but they are not done in his presence or by himself. Only the machine functions; he himself is not present – even simple self-observation is not possible without a certain degree of self-remembering."

Self-observation by itself is not sufficient for awakening. It is only a preliminary step requiring a certain degree of awakening, but the awakening remains in a certain sense passive – man has hardly emerged from sleep before he falls back into it. It is only in beginning to "remember himself" that a man really begins to awaken. This effort brings an "impression of oneself" with a special "taste" which cannot be mistaken – when a man experiences it, he begins to be less imposed upon by his personality . . . In beginning "to remember himself" a man can truly awaken. It is only with a real and long enough awakening that a man can become present to himself. And it is only with "presence to himself" that a man begins to live like a man. (20)

One of the qualities of self-remembering is an open global attention. "The most important step before any real Work can begin, is to acquire the power of free attention. And only free attention leads to self-remembering."

The ability to control and point our attention in a definite direction prepares the ground for the act of self-remembering. "There must be something present that attends – an attention that is stable, free and related to another level. I wish to be present to what is taking place, to remain conscious of myself and not lose myself."

The practice of being present is self-remembering. Instead of being taken outward, the attention of the functions is turned toward the inside for a moment of consciousness. I need to recognize that I can understand nothing if I cannot remember myself. This means remembering my highest possibilities, that is, remembering what I open to when I come back to myself alone. To remember myself also means to be present to my situation – to the place, the conditions, the way I am taken by life. There is no room for dreaming. (21)

Self-remembering requires a certain type of ‘one-pointed attention’ which differs in quality from the type of attention utilized in everyday life. To become effective and life-changing, moments of self-remembering require greater frequency and duration. “One way to prolong the duration of these precious moments is to consciously remember that the ‘self’ we are remembering is not merely our own physical and psychological self and that the divine Self is also always present, here and now.”

Of course, people can and do hold their attention for long periods of time when they have to – e.g. in the performance of any skilled operation where one slip can cause an accident, as in the case of surgeons, pilots or builders. In these circumstances the consequences of losing attention are fearful, so the attention is to some degree held and sustained by emotion. In Self-remembering the attention is held and sustained by a *positive* emotion that comes from having established a different attitude – described by the Shankaracharya like this: “A decision of this type – that all our activities are done because of the inspiration by the Absolute, and are performed only for the Absolute, and everything is achieved by the forces made available by the Absolute. If one comes to this sort of decision the remembering becomes much more frequent. There may not be constant remembering, but nevertheless it will arise much more quickly.” (22)

## Gateway to Higher States of Consciousness

Self-remembering or self-consciousness prefigures the realization of higher states of consciousness. “These glimpses of consciousness come in exceptional moments, in highly emotional states, in moments of danger, in very new and unexpected circumstances and situations; or sometimes in quite ordinary moments when nothing in particular happens. But in his ordinary or ‘normal’ state, man has no control over them whatever.”

The state of “self-consciousness” man ascribes to himself; that is, he believes that he possesses it, although actually he can be conscious of himself only in very rare flashes and even then he probably does not recognize it because he does not know what it would imply if he actually possessed it . . . We can say that man has occasional moments of self-consciousness leaving vivid memories of the circumstances accompanying them, but he has no command over them. They come and go by themselves, being controlled by external circumstances and occasional associations or memories of emotions. (23)

Self-remembering opens the possibility of fully awakening to life: "Every day, every hour, every minute life begins anew. If I could be aware of this I would have new impressions every minute. Through a sensation of myself I can open more to life."

What is demanded of me is that I wake to life. Life is creation, and the only thing I can do if I wish to awaken as a creative being, is to share in this continuous process of creation. I do not have to create anything. But I may feel myself part of this process. I may make the same gesture, I may try to speak in the same way, utter the same words, but if I am present, if I am awake to myself then I will be in the same gesture, but I will be completely different . . . I have to make room for a new set of impressions, a new kind of relationship with the world and myself in this world. And this is perhaps the only way for me to revive my relationship to the world and to share in this universal process of creation. (24)

Human beings exist in both the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality. Self-remembering creates a simultaneous connection between these two worlds:

At a certain moment we come to see two aspects, two natures, in ourselves – a higher nature related to one world and a lower nature related to another, a different world. What are we? We are neither one nor the other – neither God nor animal. We participate in life with both a divine nature and an animal nature. Man is double; he is not one. And as such, he is only a promise of man until he can live with both natures present in himself and not withdraw into one or the other. If he withdraws into the higher part, he is distant from his manifestations and can no longer evaluate them; he no longer knows or experiences his animal nature. If he slides into the other nature, he forgets everything that is not animal, and there is nothing to resist it; he is animal . . . not man. The animal always refuses the angel. The angel turns away from the animal. A conscious man is one who is always vigilant, always watchful, who remembers himself in both directions and has his two natures always confronted. (25)

The process of self-remembering is the gateway or portal to deeper levels of consciousness and awareness:

As my inner receptive space becomes, from time to time, less occupied by involuntary thoughts, impressions and so forth, more subtle impressions can be received and are received in a state of Self-remembering. And as time goes on, one feels in this state one's own living connection with the silence which lies behind sound – the same silence in which, whether we are aware of it or not, we pass our lives. This silence and the corresponding, more subtle feelings of the emptiness – the living void behind appearances, behind forms – connect us in a very vivifying way to the very ground of being, about which we cannot say more than that it is a wordless, naked experience of being . . . That something else that comes into being in us when we experience this inner state which we call Self-remembering is something that grows in us over time. (26)

Self-remembering is a prerequisite to the possibility of accessing higher energies and states of consciousness. “Self-remembering enables the ‘Real Self’ to enter and flow through human beings and form a connection with Truths that are of Divine origin.”

Gurdjieff gave the name of “self-remembering” to the central state of conscious attention in which the higher force that is available within the human structure makes contact with the functions of thought, feeling and body. The individual “remembers,” as it were, who and what he really is and is meant to be, over and above his ordinary sense of identity. This conscious attention is not a function of the mind but is the active conscious force which all our functions of thought, feeling and movement can begin to obey as the “inner master.” Consistent with the knowledge behind many contemplative traditions of the world, the practice of the Gurdjieff Work places its chief emphasis on preparing our inner world to receive this higher attention, which can open us to an inconceivably finer energy of love and understanding. (27)

Self-remembering allows us to touch the state of pure being or timeless presence. When we remember ourselves we become present to the moment, to the ceaseless creation and flow of life. This is sometimes called “being in the Being,” a voyage of discovery in which we go deeper and deeper into the world of Being:

The attention that leads to the moment of consciousness is the fire which brings about a blending of forces, a transformation. To become conscious simultaneously of both these movements requires a greater activity of my attention. The effort awakens it, awakens a force that was asleep. My attention is entirely mobilized, including at the same time the higher centers and the lower centers, the functioning of my whole Presence. This depends on a new feeling that appears, the feeling of *being*. Remembering oneself is above all remembering this other possibility, the search for a force in myself that is more active. I wish to know, I wish to *be*. (28)

In a sense, self-remembering is the death knell for the ego or conditioned self, leading to an opening to higher consciousness and universal understanding:

In so seeing, I liberate myself. For a moment I am no longer the same. My freed attention, my consciousness, then knows what I am essentially. This is the death of my ordinary “I.” To remember oneself means to die to oneself, to the lie of one’s imagination. I have the taste of understanding through awareness of the lack of understanding. In remembering oneself, it is the letting go of the ego that allows a new consciousness to penetrate. Then I see that the ordinary “I” is a phantom, a projection of myself. In fact, everything I take as manifestation is not something separate, but a projection of the essential. Returning to the source, I become conscious of that which is not born and does not die – the eternal Self. (29)

Self-remembering widens and intensifies the range of impressions we assimilate in our consciousness and removes the illusion of being a separate entity confined to a single body. “The ordinary everyday sense of self is fundamentally an illusion to which nothing can be added except further illusions. The automatic body-mind will go on living and breathing, thinking, feeling and willing until the body dies. What remains is the ‘Real I,’ the true Self which has always existed unrecognized behind the powerful conviction that ‘I am the body; I am these thoughts, feelings and desires.’”

First comes a new feeling of ‘self-consciousness,’ the hallmark of which is a sudden, unmistakable sensation of ‘waking up,’ very similar to waking out of regular sleep. Perceptions and impressions become instantly much more vivid, and a strong feeling of my own presence, here, now, is aroused and imbued with an entirely new and positive emotion about myself and everything in my sphere of perception. Everything is new and vital. The Self now experienced is the ‘real self,’ still, silent and glorious, not the constantly changing sense of a separate ego that is tied and conditioned by some object in the physical and subtle worlds. Then can come a further expansion of awareness so that the experience of ‘Self-consciousness’ becomes universal – sometimes called ‘cosmic consciousness.’ Now, the ultimate reality of myself and everything in the universe, physical, subtle and causal, becomes ‘one,’ perfect and indescribable. (30)

Self-remembering also gives rise to true happiness and fulfilment, and to unconditional Love which is expressed as a life of service to the divine Self: “Knowledge of my own Self as divine, eternal and unassailable is the driving force for a conscious, awakened life that not only perfectly reflects the harmony of the whole cosmos but actively helps to sustain it.”

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## **SELF-OBSERVATION**

*'The Study of the Way requires self-encounter along the way. You have not met yourself yet.'*  
Rumi

### **Importance of Self-Observation**

Self-observation is the beginning of self-knowledge. The challenge is to experience each thought, feeling and sensation as fully as possible without the attention wandering, and without judgement or evaluation. "As my only interest is to see, I do not intervene and the real significance of these thoughts and feelings is revealed."

Self-study and self-observation precedes and prepares for self-knowledge. "It is necessary to begin from the beginning. A man must begin observing himself as though he did not know himself at all, as though he had never observed himself."

Knowledge of oneself is a very big, but a very vague and distant aim. Man in his present state is very far from self-knowledge. Therefore, strictly speaking, his aim cannot even be defined as self-knowledge. Self-study must be his big aim. It is quite enough if a man understands that he must study himself. It must be man's aim to begin to study himself, *to know himself*, in the right way. Self-study is the work or the way which leads to self-knowledge. But in order to study oneself one must first learn *how to study*, where to begin, what methods to use. A man must learn how to study himself, and he must study the methods of self-study. The chief method of self-study is self-observation. (1)

In many spiritual traditions, especially the Gurdjieff Work, self-observation is the foundation of the practical work of inner transformation and development. "For insight to develop into the working of our body, mind and emotions a spirit of observation and deep questioning must be kept in the forefront. We can collect and quiet the mind, but then we must observe, examine, see its ways and its laws."

From the beginning, students were expected to observe themselves for at least a few minutes several times every day as if they were scientists examining elements of an experiment. Only then could they learn what they were really like behind their often inaccurate idea of themselves. Self-observation is an effort to attend, moment by moment, to all that is going on in oneself and between oneself and the world, without judgment or opinion about it. Although we all house an inner judge ready to categorize and criticize everything and everyone we meet as well as our own thoughts and actions, as soon as that accusatory element enters, we are no longer engaged in a disinterested investigation. (2)

Self-observation is a skill which can be developed and cultivated. "We do not know how to observe. Our moments of perception are contaminated by our subjective reaction. We have lost the elegance of simple perception and spontaneous response."

One has to learn to observe. If one cannot observe the movement of the mind, then what is going to take place beyond mind will not be observed. As one observes the clouds in the sky, the flowers in a garden, the ripples on the waters, the waves on the ocean, as one observes without wanting to do anything about them, so one can observe the movement of the mind in a relaxed way, without condemning, without accepting, without denying. First one observes it, sitting by oneself in solitude and if this state of observation can be sustained in solitude then one can be in the state of observation throughout the day. One goes to the office to work, listens to the words of the boss, sees the reaction coming up in oneself, of anger, of irritation, of annoyance. One sees the objective challenge and the subjective reaction coming up simultaneously. And this capacity to be aware of the objective challenge and the subjective reactions simultaneously results in an elevation of consciousness from the plane of challenge and reaction to a different plane altogether.

(3)

The majority of human beings have little sense of who they truly are and rarely question their own subjective beliefs about themselves and their life. But with self-observation, mental, emotional and physical processes that are unconscious, existing in darkness, become illuminated by the light of consciousness. "So many sides of myself are a stranger to me. Only by being present, observing, and not identifying with the content of the observation are these hidden sides seen."

We must surely acknowledge that in reality we do not know ourselves. What is more, the mistaken belief that we do know ourselves is the very obstacle that prevents us (since we think it pointless) from understanding the work which in fact we need the most. If we have some understanding of this situation, we begin to question ourselves about ourselves and we realize that we need to learn to turn ourselves towards ourselves and toward our inner life. We need to see ourselves as we are, instead of the picture we have of ourselves. To see ourselves better, we must first observe ourselves impartially – in complete sincerity, without changing anything – simply because we have this need to see ourselves as we are. That is why all work in this direction begins with self-observation – observation which is all-embracing, global and impartial. (4)

Directly observing our physical, emotional and mental functioning is the first stage of self-observation and must precede any attempts at analysis or interpretation:

There are two methods of self-observation: *analysis*, or attempts at analysis, that is, attempts to find the answers to the questions: upon what does a certain thing depend, and why does it happen; and the second method is registering, simply

*'recording'* in one's mind what is observed at the moment. Self-observation, especially in the beginning, must on no account become analysis or attempts at analysis. Analysis will only become possible much later when a man knows all the functions of his machine and all the laws which govern it . . . Before it is possible to analyze even the most elementary phenomena, a man must accumulate a sufficient quantity of material by means of *'recording.'* *'Recording,'* that is, the result of a direct observation of what is taking place at a given moment, is the most important material in the work of self-study. When a certain amount of *'records'* have been accumulated and when, at the same time, laws to a certain extent have been studied and understood, analysis becomes possible. (5)

## Challenges and Difficulties

In actual practice, sustained self-observation is very challenging. "It is difficult from the beginning. If one is to do this, it can only be done here and now. One cannot observe oneself five minutes ago or five minutes from now – only here and now. This instant moment is the only time I can observe myself."

One has to divide oneself into two – the observer and the observed. This requires in the first place a degree of control over attention which is, to begin with, extraordinarily difficult. Not only is it difficult to set up, but it is impossible to maintain for more than a very short time. What one has to do is to make an inner movement that establishes a kind of silent witness that stands beside oneself and is aware of what is going on. This is difficult because it is unaccustomed, because it makes this unusual demand to divide the attention, and because we are not taught to do it in life. It does happen, but rarely. It happens sometimes as a result of a heightened intensity of emotion. These are certain emotional moments, the memory of which stands out vividly. (6)

Self-observation is not easy and requires a sustained effort to overcome our habitual inertia and resistance to change:

In order to observe, I have to struggle. My ordinary nature refuses self-observation. I need to prepare, to organize a struggle against the obstacle, to withdraw a little from my identification – speaking, imagining, expressing negative emotions. Conscious struggle requires choice and acceptance. It must not be my state that dictates the choice. I must choose the struggle to be present and accept that suffering will appear. There is no struggle without suffering. Struggle is unacceptable to our lower nature; struggle upsets it. That is why it is so important always to remember what we wish – the meaning of our work and our Presence. In going against a habit, for example, like eating or sitting in a certain way, we are not struggling to change the habit. Or in trying not to express negative emotions,

we are not struggling against the emotions themselves or struggling to do away with their expression. It is a struggle with our identification, to allow the energy otherwise wasted to serve the work. We struggle not *against* something, we struggle *for* something. (7)

The process of change and transformation through self-observation may be slow, requiring patience and fortitude:

Self-observation is an art and science of its own, one that can be increasingly mastered over a lifetime. Following the ceaseless ebbs and flows of one's mind is not as easy as it may sound. True self-observation actually requires consistently focused and regulated effort, in all kinds of situations, easy, difficult or in-between. The first thing you learn is how surprisingly hard it is to sustain, even for a moment. Lest you become discouraged too soon, however, remember that you seldom know when you are learning or absorbing knowledge and often aren't when you think you are. That is an immutable principle of real learning, as distinguished from indoctrination, conditioning and the like. Nonetheless, you will be able to notice small changes in yourself after a while, provided you do not seek them too strenuously. Uncritical acceptance of yourself *as is* is a precondition, and your improvements will subsequently manifest as gradual reductions in obsessive and compulsive tendencies, over-emotionalism, rationalization and negativism. (8)

Rightly conducted self-observation requires an attitude and approach similar to that of a scientist studying some natural phenomenon – objective, impartial and dispassionate. In scientific research data is first collected and then analyzed before drawing any definite conclusions. There is an analogous approach in the practice of self-observation: "Observation is concerned with how we act, what we do. Analysis is concerned with why we act as we do, with what we are – because what we are determines what we do."

In the Gurdjieff Work, self-observation is one of the cornerstones of practical self-study. Students are instructed to be honest, non-judgemental and not to try to change anything that is observed:

Our fundamental effort was to see ourselves as we were, trying to witness, to be "present" to, whatever was taking place at the moment. Using various methods handed down from Gurdjieff, we were to attempt to discover in ourselves an attention that could "record" whether what we were experiencing at the moment was a thought, a feeling, a sensation, or some combination of these or other functions. We were also to attempt to observe our identification with our various habits, including daydreaming, imagination, inner talking, and so on, and to verify our own lack of inner unity. In attempting to observe ourselves – which often required going against the momentum of our habits in order to see them more clearly – we were reminded to try not to judge or analyze what was seen. According to Gurdjieff,

judgment and analysis would simply draw us back into the vicious cycle of identification with the contents of our awareness – especially with our own inner reactions to what we saw – consuming what little free attention might be available for continuing observation. If judgment or analysis occurred, however, which it often did in spite of our best intentions, we were to simply include it in our observations. In short, the Gurdjieff Work asked us to be scientists in relation to ourselves, with our own being as the object of our observations. (9)

It is difficult to maintain the quality of attention necessary for self-observation. It is easy to unconsciously move from observing thoughts, emotions and sensations to reacting, judging or commenting on them. The moment when one reacts to what one observes there is no longer pure direct observation. “The transition from simply experiencing what is happening to talking about it and reacting to it takes place without one realizing that it has taken place. The attention goes from bare awareness into a running commentary without one noticing it.”

What happens, time and time again, is that for a moment one can stand aside and impersonally experience what’s happening, but very quickly and imperceptibly observation changes into comment, and comment into emotional reaction to what one has observed. And the moment the observation changes into comment, one has lost the pure impression. One just has to go on trying, and it is not an easy thing to do. But one is simply seeing, in relation to this process of observing oneself, what goes on the whole time when one is observing other people and things: one is constantly (and cannot help it) interpreting and analyzing. It is very difficult indeed, but possible, to get away from this. (10)

## **Quality of Attention**

The quality of perception and self-observation depends on the level and degree of attention brought to the situation and circumstance at hand. A traditional Sufi story illustrates this contention:

A Sufi was a witness in a court case. The judge said: “How many steps did this man fall down?” The Sufi said, “I don’t know.” “You mean to say that you put yourself forward as a witness,” shouted the judge, “and you cannot answer a simple question?” The Sufi said: “And how long has Your Honor been a judge in this court?” “Twenty years,” the judge replied. “And can you tell me the number of beams in the roof of this hall?” (11)

The importance of developing attention in the process of self-observation was often stressed by Gurdjieff: “First you must strive to acquire attention. Correct self-observation is possible only after you have acquired a measure of attention. Begin with small things.”

The foundation of self-knowledge is patient observation of the workings of our body-mind's functioning. With persistent effort the quality of attention and observation will gradually increase, developing a capacity to become aware of moments and periods of inattention:

One has to get acquainted with the mind and its way of operation. How does one get acquainted? One has to get acquainted with the restlessness of the body and the mind. Instead of resisting the momentum of the mind, start watching. Man has not been educated to watch. He has to learn to watch and start watching for the fraction of a second. The alertness of watching will be lost again and again, but the moment one is aware of the inattention, one comes back to attention. Learning how to observe is the beginning. It is a voyage to be taken inwards, to be taken in the solitude of aloneness. (12)

When we begin to practice self-observation we quickly find that our attention is constantly shifting as we are diverted by external stimuli, passing thoughts and emotions. Although our power of attention may be weak when we first begin to observe ourselves, with practice it gradually strengthens:

However damaged my attention-function is, still it is possible for me to pay at least a minimal kind of attention to my inner processes of thought, emotion, bodily sensation, and movement. I can begin to notice my moods and how they shift. I can begin to notice my postures, how I sit, how I walk, my tone of voice, and my facial expressions. I can notice negative emotions. These provide me with a beginning practice in order to *repair my attention-function*. Only through sustained and honest struggle to observe will my attention grow and develop. (13)

The observation of one's thoughts, emotions, sensations and actions requires a special effort of attention which has been likened to a mirror in which objects are reflected just as they are. "The Silent Witness pays attention to what goes on in the centers: the head, the heart and the body. It simply pays attention. It is simply being aware, as though each function has a mirror placed in front of it."

I spoke about a method of observation of self which requires a special effort with attention: a division of attention into two parts. One of these parts is directed towards whatever activity it's engaged in, whether it be thought or action or whatever, and the other is directed to the experience of a point of awareness of what is going on. I call it the Silent Witness. It's an impartial, unjudgmental witness to what goes on. It is extremely difficult to do this, and you will find at first that you can only do it for a split second, and then you find yourself with your attention wholly drawn into what you're doing; but with practice it becomes more possible. (14)

To truly observe ourselves we need a quality of attention of a higher level than our ordinary attention. "Without a different attention, we are obliged to be automatic. With an attention that is voluntarily directed, we go towards consciousness."

We undertake the struggle to be vigilant, to watch – the struggle of the watchman. We seek to have a watchman in us who is stable. The one who watches is the one who is present . . . Observation of myself shows me how better to concentrate and strengthens the attention. It makes me see that I do not remember myself, that I do not see my state of sleep. I am fragmented, my attention is dispersed, and there is no force that is available to see. When I awaken, I make an effort to disengage enough attention to oppose this dispersion, and to see it. This is a state that is more voluntary. Now there is a watchman, and this watchman is a different state of consciousness. I must always remember that I do not know what I am, that the whole problem is *who* is present. (15)

When we begin to observe ourselves we see only the mechanical conditioned nature of our thoughts, feelings and sensations. But gradually the actual act of observing produces a direct contact with the reality of who we are:

The wish to *know* arises in me – not to know a specific thing, but to know who is here, what I am at this very moment. The place is taken. I feel it in the tensions, in the ideas that cross my mind without stopping, in the waves of emotions that respond. I do not try to resist, nor to withdraw or distract myself. This is the way I am. I accept it. And in living it, I see it *as it is*, as if I see further, through it, becoming more and more free. I see my inattention. I realize that my being depends on this power of seeing, and that I am free not to take one part of myself for the whole, free not to be isolated in one part. I need to develop an attention that is pure and sufficiently intense not to be diverted by subjective reactions. I return tirelessly to the root of my perception. In this movement my attention purifies itself and little by little eliminates the elements foreign to a direct perception. Only the impression of reality remains. (16)

### **Agent of Transformation and Change**

The actual process of self-observation itself produces self-change. “Human possibilities are very great. You cannot conceive even a shadow of what a person is capable of attaining.”

Self-study and self-observation, if rightly conducted, bring man to the realization of the fact that something is wrong with his machine and with his functions in their ordinary state. A man realizes that it is precisely because he is asleep that he lives and works in a small part of himself. It is precisely for this reason that the vast majority of his possibilities remain unrealized, the vast majority of his powers are left unused . . . Self-observation brings man to the realization of the necessity for self-change. And in observing himself a man notices that self-observation itself brings about certain changes in his inner processes. He begins to understand that

self-observation is an instrument of self-change, a means of awakening. By observing himself he throws, as it were, a ray of light into his inner processes which have hitherto worked in complete darkness. And under the influence of this light the processes themselves begin to change. (17)

Self-observation begins the process of inner change and transformation which leads to freedom from long-standing patterns of behaviour and entry into a more conscious state of presence and being:

By practicing self-observation in this way, a man will notice that it brings about a change in his inner life, and in the processes that flow from it. Self-observation requires an inner division. For observation to be possible, a certain separation between two parts of oneself has to be established. Immediately the question arises about myself: "who observes and who is observed?" And at the same time, this separation brings about the beginning of consciousness, an awareness under which "I" begins to wonder who is really myself, what is "sincere" and what is not. With this inner awareness and the light it projects, the processes that till now took place in complete darkness appear for what they are and are again put in question in relation to what I discover to be me. And this sincere questioning, continuous in the light of an expanding self-consciousness, is the very ferment which will make possible all further changes. Self-observation is in itself an instrument for awakening to another level of life and, consequently, a means of transformation. (18)

Self-observation liberates an intelligence that objectively and honestly recognizes the mechanical conditioned nature of our mental, emotional and physical life. "To the degree that self-observation is impartial then an inner space is created between the object and the subject in which intelligence can appear."

Observing how my life is being lived as impartially as possible (like a scientist looking at a virus through a microscope) allows my natural intelligence to enter and I begin to directly sense and feel what is being observed – direct, unfiltered impressions of postures, breathing, thoughts, feelings, actions, inaction. In this way I begin to recognize by the evidence of my own observation that I am not the indivisible person I have taken myself to be, but many "I"s, each with its own agenda, often quite contradictory. These "I"s feed on my energy, capture my attention, lead me here and there. (19)

The process of self-observation allows us to separate from the conditioned personality and ego patterns that govern our life and prevent the full flowering of our potential. "The act of observation changes your relationship with reactive patterns. You see them as patterns, not as what you are or as what is real. As you continue to observe, you will see other ways of working with what arises in experience."

Become the spectator, become aware of the natural flow of life, your motives, actions and what results from them. Observe the walls you have built around yourself. As you become more aware of your body and mind you will come to know yourself. As this image of things as you believe them to be subsides, you will have a clear insight of what you are – something quite other than a product of the mind. You will gradually feel less and less involved in whatever comes up and one day you will discover yourself to be in the perceiving. Once you free yourself from the idea, “I am a body” and the consequences of this idea, you will awaken to your natural state of being. Give yourself up entirely to this discovery. True awareness cannot be obtained by projecting known factors in terms of concepts and perceptions. What you are fundamentally cannot be experienced through reason and is only reached once you eliminate what you are not. (20)

### **Opening to Higher Possibilities**

When we first begin to carefully observe ourselves we see the chaotic nature of our inner life. But as we develop the ability to observe clearly, we become more conscious and awake and are able to use our energy more effectively as the bonds of past conditioning are gradually weakened:

One of the first insights that come to people that look within is a recognition that their mind is out of control; it is untrained and turbulent, filled with thoughts and plans and reactions and likes and dislikes. There is a constant barrage of sense impressions and a series of reactions to them. This constant stream of mental and physical events seems very solid. But as the mind becomes more concentrated, as it becomes focused and still, we begin to penetrate through the layers of thought and see how the thoughts and emotions simply arise and pass away moment by moment. We can examine the seemingly solid experience of body sensations and sound and sight, and see that, like the mind, they too are actually a process that is in constant change. (21)

Self-observation is not a mental activity or a thinking process. It requires a quiet, sensitive and alert mind. “To observe without contradiction is like following a fast current, a torrent, anticipating the rushing water with one’s look, seeing the movement of each little wave. There is no time to formulate, to name or to judge.” The reality of who we are can only be perceived with a fine energy or intelligence in ourselves that sees *what is* objectively and impartially:

Usually when I try to observe, there is a point from which the observation is made, and my mind projects the idea of observing, of an observer separate from the object observed. But the idea of observing is not the observing. Seeing is not an idea. It is an act, the act of seeing. Here the object is me, a living being that needs to be

recognized in order to live a certain life. This observation is not that of a fixed observer looking at an object. It is one complete act, an experience that can take place only if there is no separation between what sees and what is seen, no point from which the observation is made. Then there is a feeling of a special kind, a *wish to know*. It is an affection that embraces everything that I see and is indifferent to nothing. I need to see. When I begin to see, I begin to love what I see. No longer separate, I am in contact with it, intensely, completely. I *know*, and this knowing is the result of this new condition. I wake up to what I am and touch the source of pure love, a quality of being. (22)

As the practice of self-observation ripens and matures the ability to remain aware and in the present moment strengthens and deepens. “Sustained observation throughout the day, and in daily relationships, will help human beings grow into a qualitatively different awareness. Be aware of the objective challenges and subjective reactions simultaneously in one sweep of attention.”

Through self-observation, more *presence* comes into your life automatically. The moment you realize that you are not present, you *are* present. Whenever you are able to observe your mind, you are no longer trapped in it. Another factor has come in, something that is not of the mind: the witnessing presence. Be present as the watcher of your mind – of your thoughts and emotions as well as your reactions in various situations. Be at least as interested in your reactions as in the situation or person that causes you to react. Notice also how often your attention is in the past or future. Don’t judge or analyze what you observe. Watch the thought, feel the emotion, observe the reaction. Don’t make a personal problem out of them. You will then feel something more powerful than any of those things that you observe: the still, observing presence itself behind the content of your mind, the silent watcher. (23)

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## OBSERVING HUMAN FUNCTIONS

*'To learn to see is the first initiation into self-knowledge.'*  
Jeanne de Salzmann

### Observing Thoughts

When a person first begins to study the working of the mind and intellect the results are quite revealing, as it shows that much of our thinking is associative, repetitive and unnecessary. "Thought has its place and is a most useful tool. It is a marvellously obedient servant, but a cruel, ruthless and inefficient master."

The study of intellectual functioning is difficult. A man who tries to see this functioning notices that he does have a certain power to direct his thoughts at the start: he can sometimes keep them for a little while in the direction he has chosen. But, sooner or later, often quite soon, they escape him and he is distracted. Besides, in his ordinary life, he seldom makes use of his power to direct his thoughts except in rare moments; his mind never stops working and ideas are always there, arising automatically as a result of outer and inner stimuli about which a man can do nothing. They are automatic reactions of the intellect in various conditions which follow one after another in a chain of associations. And in the same way that we have physical habits, so do we have habits of the mind, habitual ways of thinking which, without our knowing it, are also rather few in number. (1)

When we begin to observe our thoughts we realize that "thoughts are just thoughts" and not the actual reality they merely represent. "By watching your thoughts without being drawn into them, you can learn something profoundly liberating about thinking itself, which may help you to be less of a prisoner of those thought patterns."

By observing the very process of thought itself, you get to see how such tiny and transitory "secretions" in the mind, which have no substantial existence and which are often completely illusory or highly inaccurate or irrelevant, can nevertheless be so consequential, how they can dramatically affect our states of mind and body, influence our decisions with potentially devastating downstream consequences for ourselves and others, and in any event, prevent us from being present with things as they actually are in any given moment. The practice of watching your thoughts from moment to moment can be profoundly illuminating and liberating. (2)

When we observe our thoughts we realize that they are impermanent, without any lasting substance or significance:

As you begin to see thoughts as formations, and to observe them – just as you do with bodily formations – you see that they're quite mechanical. They're extra-

ordinarily repetitive. We go over the same conversations again and again, keep inventing new ones which will never happen. We have well-worn ruts in our brains. They're conditioned by our culture and by our personal history. Many of them come right out of things we've been told by our parents and teachers. We nevertheless take tremendous pride in our thoughts and give them great authority in our lives. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that we worship thought . . . We are virtually enslaved to them. Yet they are just thoughts. They arise and pass away and have no more reality than a sound we hear or a pain in our leg. Once you see that, your passion for thought begins to fade away. You can see when it is called for, see when it is helpful, and otherwise drop it. This isn't to discredit the many marvels created by thought. It is to put it in its proper place. (3)

When thoughts are carefully observed over a period of time, they reveal a pattern of tension and psychological stress that conceal the natural clarity of mind:

As you inquire into your own thoughts, you discover how attachment to a belief or story causes suffering. The mind's natural condition is peace. Then a thought enters, you believe it, and the peace seems to disappear. You notice the feeling of stress in the moment, and the feeling lets you know that you're opposing what is by believing the thought; it tells you that you're at war with reality. When you question the thought behind the feeling and realize that it isn't true, you become present outside your story. Then the story falls away in the light of awareness, and only the awareness of what really is remains. Peace is who you are without a story, until the next stressful story appears. Eventually, inquiry becomes alive in you as the natural wordless response to the thoughts that arise. (4)

The incessant chatter of the mind obscures our deeper self – conscious presence – which is our natural state of complete oneness with Being. “When a thought subsides, you experience a discontinuity in the mental stream – a gap of ‘no-mind.’ At first, the gaps will be short, a few seconds perhaps, but gradually they will become longer. When these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you.”

Q: What exactly do you mean by “watching the thinker?”

A: The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the possessing entity – the thinker. Knowing this enables you to observe the entity. The moment you start *watching the thinker*, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated. You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter – beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace – arise from beyond the mind. You begin to awaken . . . So when you listen to a thought, you are aware not only of the thought but also of yourself as the witness of thought. A new dimension of consciousness has come in. As you listen to the thought, you feel a conscious presence – your deeper self – behind or underneath the thought, as it

were. The thought then loses its power over you and quickly subsides, because you are no longer energizing the mind through identification with it. This is the beginning of the end of involuntary and compulsive thinking. (5)

When we observe thoughts without interference or evaluation, the thoughts slowly disappear as the witness state emerges and gains strength. "When you do not get involved with the thought process or the flow of words, or the flow of mind, you are not the mind."

There must simply be a quiet looking at what composes the mind. In discovering the facts just as they are, agitation is eliminated, the movement of thought becomes slow and we can watch each thought, its causes and content as it occurs. We become aware of every thought in its completeness and in this totality there can be no conflict. Then only alertness remains, only silence in which there is neither observer nor observed. So do not force your mind. Just watch its various movements as you would look at flying birds. In this uncluttered looking, all your experiences surface and unfold. For unmotivated seeing not only generates tremendous energy but frees all tension, all the various layers of inhibitions. You see the whole of yourself. Observing everything with full attention becomes a way of life, a return to your original and natural meditative being. (6)

The very act of observing our thoughts can transform our attitude to them and provide a distance that allows a deeper dimension of mind and being to emerge:

If we begin to listen to the stream of thought as thought, to attend to thoughts as events in the field of awareness, and if we develop a certain calmness and quiet outwardly, we come to see our thinking much more clearly. We are able to listen to it and see exactly what is on our minds, and how much of it is just mental noise. Once we know that, intimately, up-close and personal, we can begin to develop new ways of relating to it. We may be shocked at what we discover, at how much of our thinking is chaotic and yet at the same time severely narrow and repetitive, shaped so much by our history and habits. Yet it is probably better to know this via firsthand experience than not to know it. When unattended, our thinking runs our lives without our even knowing it. Attended with mindful awareness, we have a chance not only to know ourselves better, and see what is on our minds, but also to hold our thoughts differently, so they no longer rule our lives. In this way, we can taste some very real moments of freedom that do not depend entirely on inner and outer conditions. (7)

The very act of observing our thoughts releases a transformative energy:

The act of seeing is an act of deliverance. When I see what is real, the real facts, the very perception, is deliverance from it. I need to disengage from all the powerful value I give to knowledge, to my opinions and theories. The very act of seeing something as a fact has an extraordinary effect by itself without the participation

of the thinking. If I can remain in front of the reality without reacting, a source of energy appears that is not the thought. The attention becomes charged with a special energy that is liberated in the act of perception. But this state of observation can come only when there is an urgency to understand and to see, and my mind gives up everything in order to observe. Then there is a new kind of observation, without any knowledge, without belief or fear, with an attention that remains firm and stays in front in order to know. It is an attention that neither denies the fact nor accepts it. The attention simply sees – going from fact to fact with the same pure energy. This act of pure seeing is an act of transformation. (8)

## Observing Emotions

Observing emotions is much more challenging and difficult than observing thoughts or bodily sensations. “We live with nothing but automatic emotional reactions, feelings which follow each other in rapid succession at each instant of our lives and cause something in each circumstance to please us or displease us, attract us or repel us.”

Of all the many areas of our experience, both in meditation practice and in the rest of our lives, emotions are often the most difficult to understand and to be with in a free way. Two factors contribute to this difficulty. First, emotions as appearances in the mind are amorphous; they have no clear boundaries, no definite sense of beginnings and endings. They are not as tangible as sensations nor as clearly defined as thoughts. Even when we feel them strongly, we may not be able to distinguish among them clearly. The second obstruction to our understanding of emotions is the fact that we are deeply conditioned to identify with them. When you are in the midst of some powerful feeling such as love or anger, excitement or sadness, notice the strong sense of self, of “I,” that usually comes with it. We can learn relatively easily to see the passing, impersonal nature of bodily sensations, and even thoughts, which come and go so quickly. But how much harder it is to see the impersonal or nonpersonal nature of emotions. Indeed, to many people the notion of nonpersonal emotions may even seem an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Emotions are often seen to be the most personal aspect of our experience. (9)

Rather than calmly watching emotions as they arise and play out, we identify with them and relate them to our personal identity and history:

Whatever emotion comes up is “what is.” When we live in separation, the mind tends to get hold of these sensations and turn them into stories. The last thing the mind wants to do is to let emotions simply be present, to be seen by the watcher, which is pure awareness. It wants to possess that emotion and turn it into a story that will convince you that the mind will work out the problem and somehow find a solution. Instead, simply rest in “what is,” whether it is the taste of marmalade

or tea, the emotion of fear, or the noise of a car going by. All these apparent happenings are simply consciousness manifesting the invitation in every form. So let those things be as they are by simply seeing it all with awareness. It's very simple. Christ said that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. It is tiny and ordinary, and is arising as "this." (10)

Emotions are usually more difficult to observe than thoughts because of their energetic power. Most people become completely identified with strong emotions, making it difficult to observe them calmly and dispassionately:

An emotion usually represents an amplified and energized thought pattern, and because of its often overpowering energetic charge, it is not easy initially to stay present enough to be able to watch it. It wants to take you over, and it usually succeeds – unless there is enough presence in you. If you are pulled into unconscious identification with the emotion through lack of presence, which is normal, the emotion temporarily becomes "you," Often a vicious circle builds up between your thinking and the emotion: they feed each other. The thought pattern creates a magnified reflection of itself in the form of an emotion, and the vibrational frequency of the emotion keeps feeding the original thought pattern. By dwelling mentally on the situation, event, or person that is the perceived cause of the emotion, the thought feeds energy to the emotion, which in turn energizes the thought pattern, and so on. (11)

The ability to observe powerful emotions such as anger or jealousy is very challenging but crucial in the work of self-transformation:

We can practice observing ourselves becoming angry, the arising thoughts, the bodily changes, the heat, the tension. Usually we don't see what is happening because when we are angry, we are identified with our desire to be "right." And to be honest, we aren't even interested in spiritual practice. It's very heady to be angry. When the anger is major we find it hard to practice with it. A useful practice is to work with all the smaller angers that occur every day. When we can practice with those as they occur, we learn; then when the bigger uproars come that ordinarily would sweep us away, we don't get swept away so much. (12)

Emotions can only be understood through creating an "observing space" which allows their pure naked energy to be seen exactly as it is. This approach avoids the two extremes of either suppressing emotions or expressing them without control or thought:

We are speaking here of becoming *one* with the emotions. This is different from and in contrast to the usual approach of suppressing them or acting them out. If we are suppressing our emotions, it is extremely dangerous because we are regarding them as something terrible, shameful, which means that our relationship to our emotions is not really open. Once we try to suppress them, sooner or later

they are going to step out and explode. There is another possibility. If you do not suppress your emotions, then you really allow yourself to come out and be carried away by them. This way of dealing with the emotions also comes from a kind of panic; your relationship with your emotions has not been properly reconciled. This is another way of escaping from the actual emotion, another kind of release, a false release. It is a confusion of mind and matter, thinking that the physical act of practicing emotions, of putting them into effect, supposedly will cure the emotions, relieve their irritation. But generally it reinforces them, and the emotions become more powerful. The relationship between the emotions and mind is not quite clear here. So the intelligent way of working with emotions is to try to relate with their basic substance, the abstract quality of the emotions, so to speak. The basic "isness" quality of the emotions, the fundamental nature of the emotions, is just energy. And if one is able to relate with energy, then the energies have no conflict with you. They become a natural process. So trying to suppress or getting carried away by the emotions becomes irrelevant once a person is completely able to see their basic characteristic, the emotions as they are. (13)

When we are mindfully aware of our emotional states we create an open space which prevents the complete identification with the emotion. "When people are able to discern and understand their own emotional ebb and flow, they can operate it and not it them."

Q: How do we deal with anger, jealousy, hate, and so on?

A: They are all concepts. Once you understand the principle, you can transpose it to every dimension of life. When you feel anger, don't judge it or name it. Make it an object of perception free from the interference of the intellect. Thoughts may come and go but if you give them no hold, you come to no conclusion. Sustain looking without conclusion and you will feel space between you and what you call anger. This space is not a psychological feeling but a genuine global body sensation. The more you become interested in the real anger, the more objective it becomes, a perception you observe rather than an emotivity you are lost in. You will see it is only fixed energy with none of the qualities the mind calls anger.

Q: What if the emotion emerges suddenly and uncontrollably?

A: When the crisis is over you must recollect in tranquility. Go back to the situation. Let it live again in your objective attention. (14)

Negative emotional states can be transformed and purified when observed with dispassion and acceptance. "If we know how to live every moment in an awakened way, we will be aware of what is going on in our feelings and perceptions in the present moment, and we will not let knots form or become tighter in our consciousness. And if we know how to observe our feelings, we can find the roots of long-standing internal functions and transform them."

Our feelings play a very important part in directing all of our thoughts and actions. In us, there is a river of feelings, in which every drop of water is a different feeling, and each feeling relies on all the others for its existence. To observe it, we just sit on the bank of the river and identify each feeling as it surfaces, flows by, and disappears . . . If we face our unpleasant feelings with care, affection, and nonviolence, we can transform them into the kind of energy that is healthy and has the capacity to nourish us. By the work of mindful observation, our unpleasant feelings can illuminate so much for us, offering us insight and understanding into ourselves. (15)

Awareness and attention are the means that transform negative emotions. "It isn't important that we are upset; what is important is the ability to observe the upset."

In clear, undivided attention, anger melts away – it loses its fuel and momentum. Its fuel and momentum are self-centered, dualistic thoughts, and the chain of reactions and counter-reactions they trigger throughout the organism. When there is attention at the moment of provocation, then listening takes the place of habitual reaction. When images are clearly detected and understood, provocation loses its power to provoke. Can you discover this for yourself? Not just words, not just anger, but the root source of it all? This is the very essence of this work of looking into oneself wholly, honestly, openly, gently, beyond all words, explanations and resolutions. (16)

With practice, negative emotional states can actually be transmuted by calmly observing them as they arise and grab hold of the mind:

When emotional states arise, catch them as they happen and discipline yourself to ask the question "What is this?" Then label it as hatred, sensuality, restlessness, whatever it is. Because you are a human being you are stuck with wanting love, security, the breast, etc. But it's not 'your' fear; it's not 'your' sensuality; it's not 'your' problem; it's the whole range of human experience which you can transmute if you are calm. If you push away and pack down the emotion of fear, or whatever, it will become a powder keg which will eventually explode. The only way to work with what appears to be unwholesome, is to know it, to see it fully. There is a point where the flow of fear or hatred has to be raised or transmuted and used for a higher purpose. (17)

## **Observing the Body**

Most of the time, we are out of touch with our body and unaware of the nature of its functioning. "The body – as a living being – rarely comes into the field of our consciousness. We are for the most part simply oblivious of its presence as an existential reality – as a living entity having its own intelligence and sphere of awareness."

What is it that is closed in us? Our senses are closed, our bodies are closed. We spend so much of our time lost in thoughts, in judgment, in fantasy and in day-dreams that we do not pay careful attention to the direct experience of our senses – to sights and sounds, to smell and taste, to sensations in the body. Because our attention is often scattered, perceptions through the sense doors become clouded. But as awareness and concentration become stronger through meditation, we spend less time lost in thought, and there is a much greater sensitivity and refinement in our sense impressions. We also begin to open the body. Often there is not a free flow of energy in the body, and as we direct our awareness inward, we experience in a very clear and intimate way the accumulated tensions, knots, and holdings that are present. (18)

Observing the body can be very useful as a method of self-knowledge. “It may help you to become more familiar with, and more sensitive to, the various kinds of unnecessary muscular tensions in your body and the various uneconomic uses of energy. It may also help you to see how closely your physical behavior is connected with the movements of your emotions and your thoughts.”

In a certain sense it is easier to observe our physical body than our thoughts and emotions, which are more fleeting and ephemeral, lacking the solidity and stability of our physical nature. “Our first work is with the body, with inhabiting and awakening the body. Work with postures is primary. Postures are physical, heavy; not like thoughts, feelings, impulses which are light, mercurial, difficult to really experience first-hand.”

If we wish to study our body, or at least, to begin with, its moving function, its movement, we must first of all be related to it. What relates us to the body is the sensation we have of it – the inner perception of my physical being, the physical sensation of myself. But sensation has an even greater importance because, if our aim is eventually to develop a stable presence in ourselves, the sensation of our physical being is an inherent part of this. It is the most concrete and easily controlled part. We always have some sensation of our body; otherwise our postures could not be maintained, our movements would be made haphazardly, or not at all. But we are not conscious of this sensation, we are unaware of it, except in extreme situations when an unusual effort is required or when something suddenly goes badly or goes wrong. The rest of the time we forget about it. In order to know and observe ourselves and to study our body we need to have this sensation. This calls for a new relationship to come into existence in me: I – conscious of – my sensation. (19)

Unless self-observation is focused and stabilized on the energies and sensations of the body it will remain as a mere mental and psychological note-taking exercise, devoid of any real developmental value. “The awareness of the body grounds us literally in the immediate, brings us into time; otherwise, living in abstraction, I, my attention, is out of time, in a kind of psychological time, not grounded in the actuality of the physical.”

It is only by grounding our awareness in the living sensation of our bodies that the “I Am,” our real presence, can awaken. Though we are told that full, complete self-observation ultimately depends on being open to a higher energy, a higher consciousness, we were also told that it begins with voluntarily putting whatever attention is available to us on our own somatic state in the moment. Gurdjieff makes clear that it is only when our ordinary attention is actively occupied with experiencing the present moment that the higher energy of awareness can appear, an awareness that relates us simultaneously to our inner and outer worlds. For those of us wishing to study ourselves by means of Gurdjieff’s method of self-observation, the starting point must be the overall sensation of the body. It is through this sensation, a kind of three-dimensional perceptual backdrop, that we can discern the various movements and energies of our own inner functions. Without the stability of this sensation, our efforts at self-observation will quickly turn into identification with whatever thoughts, feelings, daydreams, and so on are occurring. (20)

The wordless experience of one’s physical presence can act as an anchor holding the attention firm in the midst of mental and emotional distractions. “During the course of our lives, we have become so accustomed to having our attention taken by other things that we have simply lost touch with this. It is there if we can find the way to it. And it is like a sort of solid rock you can sit on in the middle of activity of different kinds, which enables you to be much more firmly based inside.”

We need to become friends with our body and to become sensitive to it, especially as it is so closely linked with our intellectual and emotional life. There are other reasons too for becoming more sensitive to the life of the body. When we see clearly that one of our troubles is that, when we do come to ourselves during the day, we relapse into the semi-hypnotic state of sleep so easily and so quickly, we see it is a real problem how to stay with oneself when one comes to oneself. Here, bodily awareness has proved to be one of the best ways of anchoring the attention so that it is not robbed all the time by impressions and the associations they arouse, or by random memories that come up in the mind and the associations they arouse. (21)

Observing the body is one of the easiest ways to stay present in daily life. “Through this internal contact with our body we come alive within our own skin, at the same time that we experience ourselves as open and unified with everything around us.”

Our body is quite obvious as an object of attention, not subtle like thoughts or emotions. We can stay aware of the body easily, but only if we remember to do so. The remembering is difficult, not the awareness . . . You do not have to practice walking meditation, or any other mindfulness of the body, for hundreds or thousands of hours to feel the benefit. Just patiently practice feeling what is there – and the body is *always* there – until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements

you make. If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do. Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it? It is very simple. Practice again and again bringing your attention back to your body. This basic effort, which paradoxically is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day. (22)

An important aspect of self-study is the observation of habits, postures and movements of the body. When we carefully observe the body we can study our gestures, how we walk, how we sit, how we hold a pen and so forth. This reveals the habitual nature of our physical being and the conditioning it has undergone:

Even at first attempt to study the elementary activity of the moving center a man comes up against habits. For instance, a man may want to study his movements, may want to observe how he walks. But he will never succeed in doing so for more than a moment if he continues to walk in the usual way. But if he understands that his usual way of walking consists of a number of habits, for instance, of taking steps of a certain length, walking at a certain speed, and so on, and he tries to alter them, that is, to walk faster or slower, to take bigger or smaller steps, he will be able to observe himself and to study his movements as he walks. If a man wants to observe himself when he is writing, he must take note of how he holds his pen and try to hold it in a different way from usual; observation will then become possible. In order to observe himself a man must try to walk not in his habitual way, he must sit in unaccustomed attitudes, he must stand when he is accustomed to sit, he must sit when he is accustomed to stand . . . All this will enable him to observe himself and study the habits and associations of the moving center. (23)

Study and observation of the physical body reveals areas of unnecessary tension which tend to deplete the system of energy and vitality. One of our first discoveries is how much unnecessary tension we hold in our face, neck, shoulders and other body parts:

There is the quite unnecessary constant tension of the *muscles* of our organism. The muscles are tense even when we are doing nothing. As soon as we start to do even a small and insignificant piece of work, a whole system of muscles necessary for the hardest and most strenuous work is immediately set in motion. We pick up a needle from the floor and we spend on this action as much energy as is needed to lift up a man of our own weight. We write a short letter and use as much muscular energy upon it as would suffice to write a bulky volume. But the chief point is that we spend muscular energy continuously and at all times, even when we are doing nothing. When we walk the muscles of our shoulders and arms are tensed unnecessarily, when we sit the muscles of our legs, neck, back, and stomach are tensed in an unnecessary way. We even sleep with the

muscles of our arms, of our legs, of our face, or the whole of our body tensed, and we do not realize that we spend much more energy on this continual readiness for work we shall never do than on all the real, useful work we do. (24)

The food we eat has a profound effect on the body. Through open observation we begin to discriminate between foods which produce states of restlessness or heaviness and foods which lead to a relaxed, vital state of being:

Q: In many of the teachings of different traditions, we are encouraged to live with a certain amount of measure in our lives. For example, nothing in excess, the Middle Way, and so on. Or we are told to pursue a certain diet or way of life. What do you think about this?

A: On the physiological level, one could say you are what you absorb. As soon as you come more into contact with the workings and sensations of your body-mind, you will see how the things you absorb act on you. You will notice how what you take in, not only by the mouth but also through the skin, affects how you wake up in the morning. You will be interested in how the body appears to you before going to sleep at night, or after a nap in the afternoon. But all this calls for observation, not the concentration of a hunting dog, but a relaxed observation without any intention. Then, in this observation free from reaction, you will act intelligently. Where you feel a lack you will make an addition of certain elements, and where you feel a heaviness you will omit certain things, until you come to the organic body, where the expanded, light, energy body is freed. No system can bring you to know yourself in this way. Only reaction-free observation, seeing the facts as they are, can do this. (25)

Our physical body stores and reflects the experiences we undergo in life and can be restored to its natural state through awareness and silent observation. "The regeneration and purification of the body is attained by establishing a discriminating attention which will dissolve and destroy all our set patterns."

Your body is your vehicle, it's your tool. You must explore it. In exploring it you will see it is conditioned through previous action, previous reactions. What we call our body is mainly only a field of reactions from previous situations, childhood and so on. So when you face your vehicle, your body, you will see that there are residues of resistance in it. Explore where the resistances are – emphasizing the accepting itself – and there comes a moment when you are free from this resistance and will use your body in a completely different way. We were often angry yesterday but today we are not angry, yet there are still residues of the anger very deep in the body. Face these tensions directly without analyzing their origins. (26)

Many people identify with physical pain or fatigue. Simply observing the body without identification, judgement or the desire to escape or change, transforms the physical state through pure awareness:

There are several ways one can deal with pain. Certainly we tend to evade or direct it in some way, but then we are involved in it through an effort of will. When we simply observe and the pain is allowed to express itself, the energy fixed as pain becomes fluid. In pure looking there is nobody, no directing ego, and this energy, finding nowhere to localize, reintegrates with the whole. It is important for you to learn how to live with pain. Never conceptualize it. I will give you an example of what I mean. If you feel tired and tell yourself, "I'm tired," you instantly identify with fatigue. This identification makes you an accomplice to this state, and thereby sustains it. But if you lie down and allowed the fatigue its liberty to speak, it becomes an object of your observation. And, as you are no longer an accomplice to it, the tired feeling quickly dissolves and you are completely refreshed. (27)

In her book *The Practice of Presence*, Patty de Llosa describes the benefits of meditative sitting and relaxation of the body. "In order to live in a more balanced way, we need to come back as often as possible to the realities of our bodies and study states of openness and closure. Our intellectual and emotional life passes through our bodies."

At the beginning of each morning I take the time to sit quietly, intentionally become aware of my physical tension wherever it may be, notice where it is strongest, and investigate limb by limb and part by part. When the body is invited to a deep relaxation, a real change may take place. But it's not a question of forcing a release. I place my best attention on my physical parts and enter into a dialogue with them. This sitting is also a practical preparation to noticing the many times during the day when I'm hyper-tense in action, when I use my hands with much more force than needed for a particular job they are doing; when my shoulders are a couple of inches higher and tighter than they need to be. (28)

The sensation of one's physical presence can be an entry point into deeper levels of being. As the observation of the body and its energies deepen, a sensitivity develops that contacts more subtle levels of the manifestations of the body. "Through the wordless experience of one's physical presence, you will approach a gateway which is connected with the experience of the other side of that gateway, by which one knows that one doesn't only live in one world, that beyond that world one reaches something that has no limitations in time and space."

Underneath all the activities of our different centers, underneath that which animates this organism, there is the ground of being. This ground of being is that upon which the whole of our personal life rests, but it is not in itself personal. The personal aspect of our being is, so to speak, put on top of it like icing on a cake. But this ground of being *is*. It does not change, it does not become. All the personal aspects of our lives are a perpetual becoming of different kinds, the passage of

one form of energy into another, whether you speak about thought, feeling, action, whatever. But the ground of being is not like that. It is therefore to our ordinary minds a very mysterious kind of thing. But there are several ways in which we can approach this mystery, which forms the foundation of our whole existence and activity. One is this silent, wordless feeling of physical presence. Already when one experiences that, one's experience, although it is a sense of physical presence, is not bound by one's body. It is like a light that is shining through one's body, but shining steadily, without fluctuation. (29)

The conditioned idea that "I am the body" and identification with physical sensations, habits and memories are superimpositions on the primal, natural state of the body:

The only way to become free from conditioning is to look without memory, without the accomplice to the conditioning. Let whatever feelings appear within you come up without visualizing or concentrating on them. In letting the feeling appear before the witness "I," before attention without periphery or center, the body goes through several degrees of elimination, for all the superimposition dissolves before the witness. You will observe a letting go of the conditioning. The emphasis that was wrongly put on the conditioning so as to reassure the person, now switches to the observation, to the witnessing, and you will soon find yourself to be the light beyond the witnessed. This is your natural state of total expansion which is energy, open and light. At first the new body sensation will be fragile and you may be solicited by the old patterns. But the body has an organic memory, a memory of its natural state of ease, which, once reawakened and sustained, will sooner or later become permanent. The old sensations will become foreign to you. You may even find it difficult to recall them. Then you will realize that the body appears in you, in awareness, and that you are not lost in the body. (30)

### **Sensing the Inner Self or Being**

With increased sensitivity it is possible to contact, harmonize and communicate with one's inner or essential being, sometimes known as 'listening to the inner voice.' One of the significant benefits of spiritual development is "to be able to develop a predictive ability: one develops a nose, a flair, for predicting a little bit in advance what one's reactions might be to a particular thing, person, place or circumstance."

It is within himself that the seeker must seek for truth. It is his inner voice, his inner certainty, that he must, as it were, rediscover and cultivate. It is in these that the secret of his full humanity always lay, and these that reason and instinct have combined to distort. If his first task on setting out on the path is to discover,

not what one learns, but how, then his best beginning is to become aware of his own reactions, listen to his inner voice. (31)

Certain habits of mind mask the perception of deeper, subtle, inner communications. "The mind needs to be developed to perceive things which are subtle as well as those which are obvious and, in addition, to introduce entirely new concepts for the mind to work with."

The student is encouraged to practise 'listening' to his intuitive sense in the attempt to perceive whether this or that word or action was indeed correct in a wider context. If he is, for instance, prompted to alternative action, he can evaluate its reliability by reviewing his day's life in retrospect. The success of this monitoring will depend upon its frequency and honesty, but will be clouded if it becomes obsessional. (32)

Many messages from the inner being are ignored or disregarded because the form or signal is not as expected. "When you are looking at or communicating with the deeper being, you should be conscious of the fact that that your conditioned reaction to certain stimuli may be quite different to the reaction of your inner being."

Nobody is closer to oneself than one's own being. The being knows what is going on, knows what influences are impacting on a person. The inner being signals to a person and the signals are very often ignored because of conditioning. When people only consider themselves to be rational and intellectual beings, they will only assimilate properly rational persuasions. The signals or feelings which come from the inner being are often ignored because they are not presented in a sophisticated enough way. For instance, when they come from the inner sensing or inner hunger, and don't exactly present themselves in the same way that the other senses do, they are ignored, even though they may be very obvious. (33)

In order to connect with subtle spiritual energies we need to be in a state of quiet attention, openness and receptivity:

Attention is the conscious force, the force of consciousness. It is a divine force. The search is for contact with an energy coming from the higher parts of our centers. At times we have an intuition of it that is less strong or more strong. This intuition is the action on us of higher centers from which we are separated by our attachments to our functions. When this action is felt, it affects the body which then receives more subtle and alive sensations. It affects the thought, which becomes capable of holding under its look what is immediately present. It affects the emotions, giving rise to a new feeling. But this action, coming from the higher centers, is not to be sought from outside or brought about forcibly by some function of the lower centers. In order for this action to be felt by my body, mind and feeling, there must be a certain state of availability. Here is the

obstacle, the barrier. The quality of energy of the lower centers must correspond to the vibrations of the higher centers. (34)

When the surface mind is quiet and relaxed it becomes receptive to the perception of finer, more subtle states of consciousness and awareness:

To be, just *be*, is important. You need not ask anything, nor do anything. It means that for the time being you are free from the obsession with ‘what next.’ When you are not in a hurry and the mind is free from anxieties, it becomes quiet and in the silence something may be heard which is ordinarily too fine and subtle for perception. The mind must be open and quiet to see. (35)

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## SELF-INQUIRY: WHO AM I?

### The Fundamental Question of Life

*'What is the meaning of existence? What is life?  
Who am I? What is my true nature? Sooner or  
later any inquiring person asks these questions.'*

Can we answer the most essential of all questions – namely, "Who am I?" or more properly, "What am I?" What is my true nature? Why was I born. Why must I die? What is my relation to my fellow man? To be human means to ask these questions, and to be totally human means we must get an answer. Until these questions arise to consciousness, we cover our lives over with all kinds of activities, worldly involvements that leave us no chance to reflect on ourselves. But sooner or later these questions arise, and then there is no escaping them. They burn within us, and intellectual answers give us no peace. We pick up books dealing with the human condition, the meaning of life, and get all these beautiful set-out phrases, these flowering metaphors, but they do not answer the question. Only the gut experience of self-awakening satisfies the gut questioning. Personal experience is the final testimony to Truth. (1)

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We should endlessly put the question "Who am I?" to ourselves. By directing our thinking, not towards objects, but towards its own root, one finally discovers the fundamental principle of being. Man possesses, deep within himself, the essence of all wisdom. He may know it or not, but truth is within him and nowhere else. (2)

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I think that there appears in the life of every human being one moment when the question "What is life?" comes up. When you really look at this you see that you are constantly in the becoming process, never in the now. You are constantly past-future, past-future. You prepare the future by the past. When you take note of this, you are brought to ask, "Who am I? What is life?" As long as the student doesn't come to this point he is not a student. The moment the student asks the question and has no reference to the past, he finds himself spontaneously in a state of not-knowing. In this not-knowing he is in a new dimension. It isn't even a new dimension because in this, there is not any direction. One must live with the question. By living with the question I mean not looking for a conclusion, an answer, because the living with the question is itself the answer. (3)

Nobody can tell you who you are. It would be just another concept, so it would not change you. *Who you are* requires no belief. In fact, every belief is an obstacle. It does not even require your realization, since you already are who you are. But without realization, who you are does not shine forth into this world. It remains in the unmanifested which is, of course, your true home. You are then like an apparently poor person who does not know he has a bank account with \$100 million in it and so his wealth remains an unexpressed potential. (4)

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It is a form of maturity in life which brings you to certain questions. From all these questions we come to the fundamental original question: Who am I? This question, Who am I?, only comes when you have inquired in all possible directions. Only when you have explored all the directions do you come to the mature state of asking Who am I? In this question, Who am I?, a mature mind says, "I don't know." It is only in this "I don't know" that there is anything knowable, perceivable. For the "I don't know" refers to itself and there the question is the answer. That is an instantaneous apperception of ourselves. That is our timelessness. When we have explored all the directions, there is a natural giving-up. And then what you give up – what gives up – has a completely new significance. (5)

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In his life a man can ask himself many questions but they all revolve around one question: "Who am I?" All questions stem from this one. So the answer to "Who am I?" is the answer to all questions, the ultimate answer. (6)

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What is this "I"? Where does this "I" come from? When you die, where does it go? These are the most important questions you can ever ask. If you attain this "I" you attain everything. That is because this "I" is part of universal substance. Your substance, this desk's substance, this stick's substance, the sun, the moon, the stars – everything's substance is the same substance. So if you want to understand your true nature, first you must attain your original substance. This means attaining universal substance and the substance of everything. Everything in this world – the sun, moon, the stars, mountains, rivers, and trees – everything is constantly moving. But there is one thing that never moves. It never comes or goes. It is never born and it never dies. What is this non-moving thing? Can you tell me? If you find that, you will find your true self and attain universal substance. (7)

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## The Method of Self-Inquiry

*'The question "Who am I?" does not come from the mind. Simply asking "Who am I?" is accompanied by a tremendous primal energy; you are on fire.'*

Self-inquiry is the one infallible means, the only direct one, to realize the unconditioned, absolute Being that you really are. The attempt to destroy the ego or mind through spiritual practices other than Self-inquiry is like the thief turning policeman to catch the thief that is himself. Self-inquiry alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists and enables one to realize the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or Absolute. Having realized the Self, nothing remains to be known, because it is perfect bliss, it is the All. (8)

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Q: What is the practice?

A: Constant search for the "I," the source of the ego. Find out "Who am I?" The pure "I" is the reality, the Absolute-Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. When That is forgotten, all miseries crop up; when That is held fast, the miseries do not affect the person. (9)

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Q: How to realize the Self?

A: Whose Self? Find out.

Q: Who am I?

A: Find it yourself.

Q: I do not know.

A: Think. Who is it that says, "I do not know?" What is not known? In that statement, who is the "I"?

Q: Somebody in me.

A: Who is that somebody? Find it. (10)

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Q: What is the means for constantly holding on to the thought "Who am I"?

A: When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them, but should inquire: "To whom did they arise?" It does not matter how many thoughts arise. As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, "To whom has this thought arisen?" The answer that would emerge would be "To me." Therefore, if one inquires "Who am I?", the mind will go back to its source, and the thought that arose will become quiescent. With repeated practice in this manner, the mind will develop the skill to stay at its source. (11)

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Turn away from the experience to the experiencer and realize the full import of the only true statement you can make, "I am."

Q: How is this done?

A: There is no "how" here. Just keep in mind the feeling "I am," merge in it, till your mind and feeling become one. By repeated attempts you will stumble on the right balance of attention and affection and your mind will be firmly established in the thought-feeling "I am." Whatever you think, say, or do, this sense of immutable and affectionate being remains as the ever-present background of the mind. (12)

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Q: How does one come to know the knower?

A: I can only tell you what I know from my own experience. When I met my Guru, he told me: "You are not what you take yourself to be. Find out what you are. Watch the sense 'I am,' find your real self." I obeyed him because I trusted him. I did as he told me. All my spare time I would spend looking at myself in silence. And what a difference it made, and how soon! It took me only three years to realize my true nature. My guru died soon after I met him, but it made no difference. The fruit of it is here, with me.

Q: What is it?

A: I know myself as I am in reality. I am neither the body, nor the mind, nor the mental faculties. I am beyond all these. (13)

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If the enquiry "Who am I" were mere mental questioning, it would not be of much value. The very purpose of Self-enquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source. It is not, therefore, a case of one "I" searching for another "I." Much less is Self-enquiry an empty formula, for it involves an intense activity of the entire mind to keep it steadily posed in pure Self-awareness. Self-enquiry is the one infallible means, the only direct one, to realize the unconditioned, absolute Being that you really are. (14)

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Q: When asked about the means for self-realization, you invariably stress the importance of the mind dwelling on the sense "I am." Why should this particular thought result in self-realization? How does the contemplation of "I am" affect me?

A: The very fact of observation alters the observer and the observed. After all, what prevents the insight into one's true nature is the weakness and obtuseness of the mind and its tendency to skip the subtle and focus on the gross only. When you try to keep your mind on the notion "I am" only, you become fully aware of your mind and its vagaries. Awareness, being lucid harmony in action, dissolves dullness and quiets the restlessness of the mind and gently, but steadily, changes its very substance. This change need not be spectacular, it may be hardly noticeable; yet it is a deep and fundamental shift from darkness to light, from inadvertence to awareness. (15)

\*

The question "Who am I?" cannot arise in the mind. It has nothing to do with memory. All memory is absorbed by the living inquiry which takes place only in the present moment. Awakening is neither immediate nor gradual; it is instantaneous apperception. The One – which we are – is beyond time. When the mind realizes this, it loses its fear and desire – desire which oscillates between having and becoming. (16)

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Q: When and how does the question "Who am I?" come from deep within.

A: It comes from the "I" itself. If there was not an "I," you would not be able to ask the question "Who am I?" So, when you pose the question "Who am I?" you can never find it, any more than the eye can see its own seeing. All that you can find is an object, a thought in space and time. But there is a moment when it gives itself up. It must be a total giving up, and then the asker is the answer. It is our dearest, it is love. (17)

## Realizing Our True Nature

*'Simply by questioning "Who am I" you will perceive your True-Nature with clarity and certainty. Always remember, you are neither your body nor your mind.'*

Were you to ask the average person what he is, he would say, "My mind" or "My body" or "My mind and body," but none of this is so. We are more than our mind or our body or both. Our True-nature is beyond all categories. Whatever you can conceive or imagine is but a fragment of yourself, hence the real you cannot be found through logical deduction or intellectual analysis or endless imagining. If I were to cut off my hand or my leg, the real I would not be decreased one whit. Strictly speaking, this body and mind are also you but only a fraction. The essence of your True-nature is no different from that of this stick in front of me or this table or this clock – in fact every single object in the universe. When you directly experience the truth of this, it will be so convincing that you will exclaim, "How true!" because not only your brain but all your being will participate in this knowledge. (18)

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There is no goal to be reached. There is nothing to be attained. You are the Self. You exist always. Seeing God or the Self is only being the Self or yourself. Seeing is being. You, being the Self, want to know how to attain the Self. All that is required of you is to give up the thought that you are this body and to give up all thoughts of external things or the not-Self. As often as the mind goes out towards outward objects, prevent it and fix it in the Self or "I." That is all the effort required on your part. (19)

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A theoretical understanding of mind is not enough to resolve the question "Who am I?" and through it the problem of birth and death. Such understanding is merely a portrait of reality, not reality itself. If you persistently question yourself, "Who am I?" with devotion and zeal – that is to say, moved by a genuine desire for self-knowledge – you are bound to realize the nature of mind. Now mind is more than your body and more than what is ordinarily called mind. The inner realization of mind is the realization that you and the universe are not two. This awareness must come to you with such overwhelming certainty that you involuntarily slap your thigh and exclaim: "Oh, of course!" (20)

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Q: What do you see?

A: I see what you too could see, here and now, but for the wrong focus of your attention. You give no attention to your self. Your mind is all with things, people and ideas, never with your self. Bring your self into focus, become aware of your own existence. See how you function, watch the motives and the results of your actions. Study the prison you have built around yourself, by inadvertence. By knowing what you are not, you come to know your self. All you need is to get rid of the tendency to define yourself. All definitions apply to your body only and to its expressions. Once this obsession with the body goes, you will revert to your natural state, spontaneously and effortlessly. The only difference between us is that I am aware of my natural state, while you are bemused. Just like gold made into ornaments has no advantage over gold dust, except when the mind makes it so, so are we one in being – we differ only in appearance. We discover it by being earnest, by searching, enquiring, questioning daily and hourly, by giving one's life to this discovery. (21)

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It is true that the majority of people think of themselves as a body and a mind, but that doesn't make them any less mistaken. The fact is that in their essential nature all sentient beings transcend their body and their mind, which are not two but one. The failure of human beings to perceive this fundamental truth is the cause of their sufferings. Because we delude ourselves into accepting the reality of an ego-I, estrangement and strife inevitably follow. The Buddha in his enlightenment perceived that ego is not indigenous to human nature. With full enlightenment we realize we possess the universe, so why grasp for what is inherently ours? We have only to persist in questioning, "Who am I?" if you wish to experience the truth of what I have been saying. (22)

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The sense of being, of "I am," is the first to emerge. Ask yourself whence it comes, or just watch it quietly. When the mind stays in the "I am," without moving, you enter a state which cannot be verbalized but can be experienced. All you need to do is try and try again. After all the sense "I am" is always with you, only you have attached all kinds of things to it – body, feeling, thoughts, ideas, possessions, etc. All these self-identifications are misleading. Because of them you take yourself to be what you are not. (23)

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He who longs to know his true nature must first understand the mistaken identification with objects: "I am this," "I am that." All identifications, all states are transitory and consequently unreal. Identifying the "I" with this or that is the root of ignorance. Ask yourself what is permanent throughout all the stages of life. The question "Who am I?" will be found to have no answer. You cannot experience what is permanent in a subject/object relationship, as something perceivable. You can only formulate and explain that which you are not. What you fundamentally and continually are cannot be put into words or reasoned out. Being is non-dual, absolute and constant, ever-present whatever the circumstances. (24)

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To know what you are you must first investigate and know what you are not. And to know what you are you must watch yourself carefully, rejecting all that does not necessarily go with the basic fact: "I am." The idea: I am born at a given place, at a given time, from my parents, and now I am so-and-so, living at, married to, father of, employed by, and so on, are not inherent in the sense "I am." Our usual attitude is of "I am this." Separate consistently and perseveringly the "I am" from "this" or "that," and try to feel what it means to *be*, without being "this" or "that." All our habits go against it and the task of fighting them is long and hard sometimes, but clear understanding helps a lot. The clearer you understand that on the level of the mind you can be described in negative terms only, the quicker you will come to the end of your search and realize your limitless, timeless being. (25)

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If you meditate on this question, "Who am I?", if you begin to perceive that neither the body nor the brain nor the desires are really you, then the very *attitude of enquiry* will eventually draw the answer to you out of the depths of your own being, it will come to you of its own accord as a deep realization. Know the real self, and then the truth will shine forth within your heart like sunshine. The mind will become untroubled and real happiness will flood it, for happiness and the true self are identical. You will have no more doubts once you attain this self-awareness. (26)

### Consciousness and "I am"

*'The "I am" is the substratum, the underlying background to every experience, sensation, perception, thought and feeling'*

You know so many things about yourself, but the knower you do not know. Look within diligently, remember to remember that the perceived cannot be the perceiver. Whatever you see, hear or think of, remember – you are not what happens,

you are he to whom it happens. Delve deeply into the sense "I am" and you will surely discover that the perceiving center is universal, as universal as the light that illumines the world. All that happens in the universe happens to you, the silent witness. On the other hand, whatever is done, is done by you, the universal and inexhaustible energy. (27)

\*

You want to know yourself. For this keep steadily in the focus of consciousness the only clue you have: your certainty of being. Be with it, play with it, ponder over it, delve deeply into it, till the shell of ignorance breaks open and you emerge into the realm of reality. (28)

\*

The consciousness of being the "I am" is the basis of consciousness. When we think "I am" and only that, without any qualification, we are pure consciousness without an object, the timeless background, the reality which underlies the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. But the moment we say: "I am tired, I am clever, I am a Knight of the Bath" . . . we risk falling into false identifications. When we say "Who am I?" and establish my consciousness in a state of empty availability, I make it possible for this consciousness to return to the pure subject. I prevent my consciousness from being attached to any qualification whatsoever, thus putting it in a state of helplessness which enables it to turn back on itself and return to its original purity. (29)

\*

So who is the experiencer? You are. And who are you? Consciousness. And what is consciousness? This question cannot be answered. The moment you answer it, you have falsified it, made it into another object. Consciousness, the traditional word for which is *spirit*, cannot be known in the normal sense of the word, and seeking it is futile. All knowing is within the realm of duality – subject and object, the knower and the known. The subject, the I, the knower without which nothing could be known, perceived, thought, or felt, must remain forever unknowable. This is because the I has no form. Only form can be known, and yet without the formless dimension, the world of form could not be. It is the luminous space in which the world arises and subsides. That space is the life that I Am. It is timeless. I am timeless, eternal. What happens in that space is relative and temporary; pleasure and pain, gain and loss, birth and death. (30)

\*

Q: Our real being is all the time with us. How is it that we do not notice it?

A: Yes, you are always the Supreme. But your attention is fixed on things, physical or mental. When your attention is off a thing and not yet fixed on another, in that interval you are pure being. When through the practice of discrimination and detachment, you lose sight of sensory and mental states, pure being emerges as the natural state.

Q: How does one bring to an end this sense of separateness?

A: By focusing the mind on "I am," on the sense of being, "I am so-and-so" dissolves and "I am a witness only" remains and that too submerges in "I am all." Then the all becomes the One. Abandon the idea of a separate "I" and the question of "whose experience?" will not arise.

Q: You speak from your own experience. How can I make it mine?

A: You speak of my experience as different from your experience, because you believe we are separate. But we are not. On a deeper level my experience is your experience. Dive deep within yourself and you will find it easily and simply. Go in the direction of "I am." (31)

\*

The whole universe is experienced in the consciousness "I Am." If that is not there, what else can ever exist? This consciousness is beating a drum; everyone is carried away by the noise of the drum. Who looks for the drummer? Who is sounding and beating the drum? (32)

\*

Become conscious of being conscious. Say or think "I Am" and add nothing to it. Be aware of the stillness that follows the I Am. Sense your presence, the naked, unveiled, unclothed beingness. It is untouched by young or old, rich or poor, good or bad, or any other attributes. It is the spacious womb of all creation, all form. (33)

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Hold on to this knowingness "I am," and the fount of knowledge will well up within you, revealing the mystery of the Universe, of your body and psyche, of the play of the five elements, and of everything else. In the process of this revelation, your individualistic personality confined to the body will expand into the manifested universe, and it will be realized that you permeate and embrace the entire cosmos. (34)

## Meditations

Give up all questions except one: "Who Am I?" After all, the only fact you are sure of is that you are. The "I am" is certain. The "I am this" is not. Struggle to find out what you are in reality.

\*

In reality there is only one question. And the asker of this question is the answer. There are not two, there is only one. The only question is "Who am I?"

\*

"I exist" is the only permanent, self-evident experience of everyone. Nothing else is so evident as "I am."

\*

There is nothing so simple as being the Self. It requires no effort, no aid. One has to leave off the wrong identity and be in the eternal, natural, inherent state.

\*

Do nothing, absolutely nothing! Just *be*, be the knowledge "I am" only and abide there.

\*

Don't say "I am this," "I am that." Just hold on to yourself, you are. Just be, just be "you are."

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Is there anyone who is not aware of himself? Each one knows, yet does not know the Self. A strange paradox.

\*

No attempt is needed to attain Realization. For it is nothing external, nothing new. It is always and everywhere – here and now.

\*

Go back to that state of pure being, where the "I am" is still in its purity before it got contaminated with "I am this" or "I am that." Your burden is of false self-identifications – abandon them all.

\*

Everybody is glad to be. But few know the fullness of it. You come to know by dwelling in your mind on "I am," "I know," "I love" – with the will of reaching the deepest meaning of these words.

\*

There is nothing to fear. Just deepen and deepen the questioning until all your preconceived notions of who and what you are vanish, and at once you will realize that the entire universe is no different from yourself.

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## **SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**

*'Without self-knowledge, without understanding the workings and functions of our being, we cannot be free. That is why in all ancient teachings the first demand at the beginning of the way to liberation was: "Know Thyself."'*

G.I. Gurdjieff

### **'Know Thyself'**

The journey of spiritual development and self-realization begins with self-study. Self-study leads to self-knowledge and eventually to an understanding of the meaning and purpose of existence. The words of Socrates and many others – ‘Know thyself’ – are a signpost for all those who seek true knowledge and being:

*Gnothi Seauton* – Know Thyself. These words were inscribed above the entrance to the temple of Apollo at Delphi, site of the sacred Oracle. In ancient Greece, people would visit the Oracle hoping to find out what destiny had in store for them or what course of action to take in a particular situation. It is likely that most visitors read those words as they entered the building without realizing that they pointed to a deeper truth than anything the Oracle could possibly tell them. They may not have realized either that, no matter how great a revelation or how accurate the information they received, it would ultimately prove to be to no avail, would not save them from further unhappiness and self-created suffering, if they failed to find the truth that is concealed in that injunction – Know Thyself. What these words imply is this: Before you ask any other question, first ask the most fundamental question of your life: Who am I? (1)

To understand ourselves we need to investigate our body and mind through direct experience. “You are always changing, you are never the same and each moment reveals a new facet, a new depth, a new surface.”

The only way to experience truth directly is to look within, to observe oneself. All our lives we have been accustomed to look outward. We have always been interested in what is happening outside, what others are doing. We have rarely if ever tried to examine ourselves, our own mental and physical structure, our own actions, our own reality. Therefore we remain unknown to ourselves. We do not realize how harmful this ignorance is, how much we remain the slaves of forces within ourselves of which we are unaware. The inner darkness must be dispelled to apprehend the truth. We must gain insight into our own nature in order to understand the nature of existence. The entire universe and the laws

of nature by which it works are to be experienced within oneself. They can *only* be experienced within oneself. The path is also a path of purification. We investigate the truth about ourselves not out of idle intellectual curiosity but rather with a definite purpose. By observing ourselves we become aware for the first time of the conditioned reactions, the prejudices that cloud our mental vision, that hide reality from us and produce suffering. We recognize the accumulated inner tensions that keep us agitated, miserable, and we realize that they can be removed. Gradually we learn how to allow them to dissolve, and our minds become pure, peaceful, and happy. (2)

A person must know themselves before they can know others and the world itself. That is why the path of knowledge begins with the study of oneself and ‘learning how to learn’:

The human form is a microcosm of the universe. All that supposedly exists outside in reality exists in us. The world is in you and can become known in you as you. What then is this ‘you’? As a human being related to all living beings we must first be related to ourselves. We cannot understand, love and welcome others without first knowing and loving ourselves. Generally, however, we spend our whole lives involved in what is apparently outside us without ever looking at what is closest. We give no time to the thorough reading of our own book, our reactions, resistances, tensions, emotional states, physical stresses and so on. This reading requires no system of specially allotted time spent in introspection. It involves only facing oneself during the day without the habitual identification with an individual center of reference, an I-image, a personality, a propagator of viewpoints. (3)

In order to nurture and develop self-understanding we need to get to know ourselves as we really are: our minds, our emotions, our behaviour and our being. “We think we know ourselves, but actually we don’t. There are all sorts of undiscovered areas of our thoughts and actions. What we find in ourselves might be quite astonishing.”

Self-knowledge requires a new perspective of “seeing yourself with eyes other than your own” and understanding how your body-mind reacts to the experiences of life. “Observe without analysis the way in which you react physically, emotionally and mentally in the different circumstances of everyday life.”

Our reactions to the situations of everyday living provide constant opportunities for self-knowledge and insight. “Be interested in how you function in daily life, explore without any criticism or justification. Simply take note; that is enough.”

In day-to-day activities, in moment-to-moment living, can the spirit of questioning and nonjudgmental attending continue to reveal and clarify the ways of the self? It is arduous to look at ourselves in fearless honesty, uninfluenced by ideas and images of what we are or should be. It is easier to cling to the apparent

security of our automatic patterns of thinking and reacting, but these inevitably bring conflict and sorrow. Only with immediate and clear insight can the mind begin to free itself from its conditioning, opening up to the depth of understanding that is compassion. (4)

One of the purposes of self-knowledge is to remove barriers to understanding; to ‘polish’ the surface personality and release human potential, allowing the essential self to emerge and ‘shine.’ “Man has to come to understand how to see himself as he really is, so that he can achieve something in the area which he calls ‘what might be’.”

Self-knowledge grows as we objectively explore the nature of body, mind and feelings in a detached, non-judgemental manner. “Self-knowledge is an aim, but it is also a means. Self-knowledge is a means of deeper understanding and ultimately of self-realization.”

To face ourselves scientifically we must accept the facts as they are without agreement, disagreement or conclusion. It is not a mental acceptance, an acceptance of ideas, but is completely practical, functional. It requires only alertness. Attention must be bipolar. We see the situation and at the same time see how it echoes in us as feeling and thought. In other words, the facts of a situation must include our own reactions. We remain in the scientific process free from judgment, interpretation and evaluation, only looking in different moments in the day at our psychological, intellectual and physical ground and our level of vitality. There is no motive, no interference from a ‘me,’ no desire to change, grow or become. In this way we become more intimate with ourselves, more aware of how we function from moment to moment in everyday life. When we are explorers, real listening appears automatically and in listening there is openness, receptivity. Exploration never becomes a fixation with a goal to be achieved. It remains as a welcoming that brings originality and life to every moment. (5)

Before there can be intelligent action there must be self-knowledge. Krishnamurti stressed this idea in his teachings: “There is no understanding without self-knowing; learning about the self is not accumulating knowledge about it; gathering of knowledge prevents learning; learning is not an additive process; learning is from moment to moment, as is understanding.”

Ignorance is not the lack of knowledge but of self-knowing; without self-knowing there is no intelligence. Self-knowing is not accumulative as knowledge; learning is from moment to moment. It is not an additive process; in the process of gathering, adding, a center is formed, a center of knowledge, of experience. In this process, positive or negative, there is no understanding; for as long as there is an intention of gathering or resisting, the movement of thought and feeling are not understood, there is no self-knowing. Without self-knowing there’s no intelligence. Self-knowing is active present, not a judgment; all self-judgment implies an accumulation, evaluation from a center of experience and knowledge. It is this

past that prevents the understanding of the active present. In the pursuit of self-knowing there is intelligence. (6)

In order to understand who we really are we first need to understand what we are not through a process of self-inquiry and detached self-examination:

Discover all that you are not. Body, feelings, thoughts, ideas, time, space, being and not-being, this or that – nothing concrete or abstract you can point to is you. A mere verbal statement will not do – you may repeat a formula endlessly without any result whatsoever. You must watch yourself continuously -- particularly your mind – moment by moment, missing nothing. This witnessing is essential for the separation of the self from the not-self. (7)

## **Approach to Self-Study**

An honest, non-critical assessment of one's actual state is crucial in the process of spiritual self-development. "The beginning for the Traveller on the Path is to start to look for faults in oneself which one previously sought in others; and to begin to perceive in others the merits which one formerly imagined to be one's own."

In authentic spiritual teachings emphasis is placed on monitoring one's behaviour and learning about oneself in an honest and non-judgemental way – self-observation without neurotic self-abasement. "Become curious about the true nature of yourself, about what you really are, because that curiosity opens you up to the undivided state. From the undivided state, one of the first things realized is that you don't really know who you are."

When you are examining yourself, you are examining your actions or reactions to situations in a constructive, not hostile way. You are examining yourself with patience, in a harmonious way, as a good friend of yourself – and as such, you do not attack and aggress against yourself. Constructive criticism may be required – and it can even be harsh criticism if necessary – but use the same approach in measuring or criticizing yourself as you would in the case of a very dear cherished friend. (8)

Self-study is a conscious effort which begins with the development and control of attention. "Simultaneously and progressively, we will feel that the first phase of study puts us in touch with work on our attention, which will become the central axis of new inner experiences."

With self-study it is important to be impartial and not to expect any quick results. "What is crucial is to see oneself, to observe one's mechanical, automatic, reactionary behaviour without comment, and without making any attempt initially to change that behaviour."

Self-examination should be an objective, non-judgemental activity conducted as impartially as possible. “What is essential is to become more acquainted with your intimate nature, your sensations, body tensions, feelings and desires, without making any judgment.”

The observer has no emotions. It’s like a mirror. Everything just passes in front of it. The mirror makes no judgment. Whenever we judge, we’ve added another thought that needs to be labelled. The observer is not critical. Judging is not something the observer does. The observer simply watches or reflects, like a mirror. If garbage passes in front of it, it reflects garbage. If roses pass in front of it, it reflects roses. The mirror remains a mirror, an empty mirror. The observer doesn’t even accept; it just observes. (9)

Self-knowledge is a lifetime commitment of study and work, in which one gradually builds up a picture of oneself. “Increase of self-knowledge and change of the level of being happens of itself simply by again and again bringing the light of our attention and intelligence to what we have been blind to.” The significance of persistence in this effort of self-knowing is encapsulated in a saying of Saadi: *‘Not every oyster holds a pearl; not every time does the archer hit his target.’*

With continued practice the very act of studying and observing ourselves, honestly and without judgement, dissolves the personality and ego structures which block higher development and being. “The pure act of seeing a fact, whatever the fact may be, brings its own understanding and from this, mutation takes place.”

We are slaves to what we do not know, whereas we are masters of what we do know. Whatever vice or weakness we uncover in ourselves, and whose causes and workings we come to understand, we overcome by the very knowing. The inadvertence dissolves when brought into the light of awareness. Just by opening ourselves, by allowing whatever is to remain in the light of awareness, we rob it of its power to harm. We must open ourselves in this way without any judgment, without any need to integrate, change, or do something about whatever appears. (10)

Self-knowledge is an inner experiential understanding of ourselves as human beings rather than an analytical or intellectual understanding:

Self-knowledge has from the beginning of time been fundamental in many doctrines and many schools. Not an exterior analytical knowledge, such as modern western science has been pursuing for so long, avoiding all the inner questions or trying to reduce them to purely materialistic explanations, but rather an inner self-knowledge wherein, to avoid distortion, each element, each structure, each function, as well as their relationships and the laws which govern them, are not looked at only from the outside, but must be experienced in the whole context to which they belong and can only be truly known “at work” in their totality.

This is a completely different attitude from that which modern science has accustomed us to, and the one does not exclude the other. But, for our possibility of inner evolution, one thing must be clear. What is required is not intellectual knowledge, which, properly speaking, is mere information. Such information may be necessary, but is absolutely inadequate in our search. For this search, the self-knowledge we need is above all an inner experience, consciously lived, of what we are, including the whole range of impressions of oneself which one receives. (11)

Great stress is placed on sincerity in the process of self-study. "A man must make the decision that he will be absolutely sincere with himself, will not close his eyes to anything, will not limit himself to any previously erected walls."

Many things are necessary for observing. The first is sincerity with oneself. This is very difficult. It is much easier to be sincere with a friend. We find it difficult to look at ourselves, for we are afraid that we may see something bad, and if by accident we do look deep down, we see our own nothingness. We try not to see ourselves because we fear we shall suffer remorse of conscience. There are many dirty dogs in us, and we do not want to see them. Sincerity may be the key to the door through which one part may see another part. Sincerity is difficult because of the thick crust that has grown over essence. Each year a man puts on a new dress, a new mask, one over the other. All this has gradually to be removed. It is like peeling off the skins of an onion. Until these masks are removed we cannot see ourselves. (12)

Self-understanding arises when we objectively observe the reality or facts of our life as they happen. "Learning about yourself is never the same as accumulating knowledge about yourself. Learning is active present and knowledge is the past. Knowing, learning about yourself has no beginning and no end, whereas knowledge has. Knowledge is finite, and learning, knowing, is infinite."

There are only facts, not greater or lesser facts. The fact, the what is, cannot be understood when approached with opinions or judgments; opinions, judgments then become the facts and not the fact that you wish to understand. In pursuing the fact, in watching the fact, the what is, the fact teaches and its teaching is never mechanical, and to follow its teachings, the listening, the observation must be acute; this attention is denied if there is a motive for listening . . . There is no system or method which will give understanding but only a choiceless awareness of a fact. Meditation according to a system is the avoidance of the fact of what you are; it is far more important to understand yourself, the constant changing of the facts about yourself, than to meditate in order to find god, have visions, sensations and other forms of entertainment. (13)

An important aspect of self-knowledge is understanding the nature of our relationships with other people, indicated by the aphorism: '*None should be worse off from having been in contact with me.*'

If someone is bad-tempered there may be a reason for it which has nothing to do with me personally. We must try to remember that often it is not the person himself but his state that behaves irritably towards us. As I change, so does another. If you can do this and remember yourself and observe yourself you will see many things, not only in the other person, but in yourself, things you never even thought of. '*Only he can be just who can enter into the position of another.*' And '*Judge others by yourself and you will rarely be mistaken.*' (14)

The process of examining, monitoring and looking at oneself has a higher developmental function and purpose:

A man will notice that he cannot observe everything he finds in himself *impar-tially*. Some things may please him, other things will annoy him, irritate him, even horrify him. And it cannot be otherwise. Man cannot study himself as a remote star, as a curious fossil. Quite naturally he will like in himself what helps his development and dislikes what makes his development more difficult, or even impossible. This means that very soon after starting to observe himself, he will begin to distinguish *useful* features and harmful features in himself, that is, useful or harmful from the point of view of his possible self-knowledge, his possible awakening, his possible development. He will see sides of himself which *can* become conscious, and sides which *cannot* become conscious and *must be eliminated*. In observing himself, he must always remember that his self-study is the first step towards his possible evolution. (15)

The very process of calmly observing ourselves transforms our body, mind and feelings leading to a new level of inner development and being. "Don't look for quick results; there may be none within your noticing. Unknown to you, your psyche will undergo a change, there will be more clarity in your thinking, charity in your feeling, purity in your behaviour. You need not aim at these – you will witness the change all the same."

Be the explorer of your body, your feelings and desires, your moods and psychic states. Drop all ideas about what you are. Live without knowing anything, like an explorer, for the adventure of discovery, from moment to moment. In this exploration you'll see that you don't really observe, that you project your fears and desires and superimpose these onto the world. So all you see is your own conditioning, not the world as it really is. The awareness, the understanding of how you really function, not just psychologically but on every level, is itself transformation. If you try to make any voluntary change all you are doing is shifting energy around a little and making things momentarily more comfort-

able for yourself. In the attitude of openness and exploration you automatically become silent. (16).

### **Studying the ‘Secondary Self’ or ‘False Personality’**

The ‘secondary self’ or ‘commanding self’ is described by the Sufis as a complex of reactions and self-imposed barriers erected by the ‘lower understanding.’ This false personality is the superficial (though necessary) intellectual-emotional system which hides or ‘veils’ the essence or deeper individuality of the human being. In a conversation with his students Gurdjieff described the mechanical nature of this conditioned self:

When observing himself, a man will record a whole series of very important aspects of his being. To begin with he will record with unmistakable clearness the fact that his actions, thoughts, feelings and words are the result of external influences and that nothing comes from himself. He will understand and see that he is in fact an automaton acting under the influence of external stimuli. He will feel his complete mechanicalness. Everything ‘happens,’ he cannot ‘do’ anything. He is a machine controlled by accidental shocks from outside. Each shock calls to the surface one of his I’s. A new shock and that I disappears and a different one takes its place. Another small change in the environment and again there is a new I. A man will begin to understand that he has no control of himself whatever, that he does not know what he may say or do the next moment, he will begin to understand that he cannot answer for himself even for the shortest length of time. He will understand that if he remains the same and does nothing unexpected, it is simply because no unexpected outside changes are taking place. He will understand that his actions are entirely controlled by external conditions, and he will be convinced that there is nothing permanent in him from which control could come, not a single permanent function, not a single permanent state. (17)

Self-deception and bias, two characteristics of the secondary self, prevent real knowledge and understanding. “The Sufi conception of the lower, ‘Commanding Self’ -- which ‘veils’ the ability to discern Reality – insists that anyone who tries to move ahead with spiritual activity without transforming this Self will destroy his gains.” The Sufi ancient Junaid of Baghdad alluded to the distorting operation of the secondary self in this observation: “If you seek a brother to share your burden, brothers are in truth hard to find. But if you are in search of someone whose own burden you yourself share, there is no scarcity of such brothers.”

The reactive patterns of the secondary self have their source in unconscious childhood conditioning by parents and the surrounding culture, and continue to be shaped and strengthened as we grow older:

Reactions are patterns of emotions and behaviours, formed by conditioning, that run automatically when they are triggered by internal or external events. They are the cumulative result of a complex interaction among emotions, behaviours, and perception. Significant sources of conditioning include the needs of the body and the basic human need for love, affection, and other forms of attention. We can add family history and values, childhood and adult experience, and social and cultural influences. Reactive patterns also develop from biological propensities and such evolutionary traits as the flight-or-fight response . . . Think of reactive patterns as mechanisms. They are pre-established by conditioning, are triggered by external and internal events, and, once triggered, run only according to what has been conditioned. Such mechanisms may appear to be aware or responsive, but they are no more responsive than a computer program. (18)

One important method of self-study, leading to the diminution of the secondary self, is to oppose habits for the purpose of self-knowledge and inner development:

The observation and the study of habits is particularly difficult because, in order to see and ‘record’ them, one must escape from them, free oneself from them, if only for a moment. So long as a man is governed by a particular habit, he does not observe it, but at the very first attempt, however feeble, to struggle against it, he feels and notices it. This opens up a practical method of self-observation. It has been said before that a man cannot change anything in himself, that he can only observe and ‘record.’ This is true. But it is also true that a man cannot observe and ‘record’ anything if he does not try to struggle with himself, that is, with his habits. Without a struggle a man cannot see what he consists of. The struggle with small habits is very difficult and boring, but without it, self-observation is impossible. (19)

Understanding the nature of the secondary self leads to higher developmental growth. “By bringing the operation of the Commanding Self into view, its limitations, distortions and peculiarities can be observed, both by the individual himself and by observers.”

The conquest of the “Commanding Self” is not achieved merely by acquiring control over one’s passions. It is looked upon as a taming of the wild consciousness which believes that it can take what it needs from everything (including mysticism) and bend it to its own use. The tendency to employ materials and methods from whatever source for personal benefit is understandable in the partially complete world of ordinary life, but cannot be carried over into the greater world of real fulfillment. (20)

The habitual conditioned patterns which underlie the structure of the personality must be directly seen and acknowledged before they can be transformed. “We end suffering by ceasing

to identify with what we are not: a pattern that interprets experience as separate and other and then operates to control or justify its own imagined existence.”

To wake up is hard. We must first realize that we are asleep. Next, we need to identify what keeps us asleep, start to take it apart, and keep working at dismantling it until it no longer functions. As soon as we make an effort to wake up, we start opening up to how things are. We experience what we have suppressed or avoided and what we have ignored or overlooked. When this happens, the reactive patterns that have run our lives, kept us in confusion, distorted our feelings, and caused us to ignore what is right in front of us are triggered. They rise up strongly to undermine the attention that is bringing us into a deeper relationship with what we are and what we experience. When we can see those patterns and everything that is constructed out of them as the movement of mind and nothing else, we begin to wake up. (21)

The light of awareness transforms the secondary personality by bringing into consciousness that which was previously hidden or unconscious. “Only living stillness, stillness without someone trying to be still, is capable of undoing the conditioning our biological, emotional and psychological nature has undergone.”

To become free of the ego is not really a big job but a very small one. All you need to do is to be aware of your thoughts and emotions – as they happen. This is not really a “doing,” but an alert “seeing.” In that sense, it is true that there is nothing you can do to become free of the ego. When that shift happens, which is the shift from thinking to awareness, an intelligence far greater than the ego’s cleverness begins to operate in your life. Emotions and even thoughts become depersonalized through awareness. Their impersonal nature is recognized. There is no longer a self in them. They are just human emotions, human thoughts. Your entire personal history, which is ultimately no more than a story, a bundle of thought and emotions, becomes of secondary importance and no longer occupies the forefront of your consciousness. It no longer forms the basis for your sense of identity. You are the light of Presence, the awareness that is prior to and deeper than any thoughts and emotions. (22)

By examining oneself from moment to moment the mechanisms of the conditioned self are clearly revealed. “Become more and more acquainted with your body-mind, how you function in daily life, your reactions, your resistance. It is the awareness of it that brings the change, that brings the purification.”

There is nothing to try to add or subtract from the life you are living. It takes only alertness to see habits of thinking and how these contract us. When we see that almost all of our existence is mechanical repetition we automatically step out of the pattern and into observing. With the disappearance of the habit of being someone doing something, only naked attention remains and in its light

the functioning of projection is made clear. The mind regains its natural sensitivity and flexibility and at the same time we feel freedom in relation to our environment. In open exploration, where you accept yourself scientifically, the day will come when you feel yourself completely autonomous and fulfilled without qualification. (23)

When we cease to identify with our body and actions, our thoughts and feelings, we realize that the ‘observing self’ or ‘witness’ is the one element in our lives that never changes:

Your parents have given you a shape and a name. Your education and environment attribute many qualifications to you and you identify with these. In other words, society has given you an idea of being someone. So when you think of yourself, you think in terms of a man with all the various qualifications that accompany this image. This accumulation has gone through many changes yet *you* are aware of them. You can remember when you were seven. You can recall when you had no beard. This indicates that there’s an observer of these changes. The ability to observe change means that the change is in you, you are not in the change, for if you were how could you observe it? So what really belongs to the insight is what is changeless in you. You are the witness of all changes but this witness never changes. So the real question is, “How can I become acquainted with the witness?” (24)

## Examining Mental and Emotional Patterns

Most people have little control over the stream of thoughts produced by their minds and by external impacts. “The constantly moving flow of thoughts in our mind, which we can neither stop nor control, take up an enormous amount of our energy.” There is a Zen saying: *‘It is better to master the mind than be mastered by the mind.’*

We need to realize that our minds have been implanted and ingrained with assumptions and preconceptions deeply rooted in our culture. “Clearing the mind of the dross of conditioning is essentially an operation of *unlearning*. Consciousness must be emptied of all the debris that impairs perception and cognition.” A classic Zen story illustrates this principle:

Nan-in, A Japanese master during the Meiji era, received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured the visitor’s cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he could no longer restrain himself. “It is overfull. No more will go in!” “Like this cup,” Nan-in said, “you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?” (25)

Self-study involves becoming aware of perceptual sets, mental blocks, habits of thinking and assumptions. The initial step in higher development is to “become aware of automatic pattern-

thinking, the conditioned associations and indoctrinated values that limit human perception and receptivity.” It is important to distinguish areas in which habits and assumptions are useful or even essential and where they are unsuitable. “Study the assumptions behind your actions. Then study the assumptions behind your assumptions. ‘Why did I do such-and-such a thing?’ is all very well. But what about ‘How otherwise could I have done it?’”

A vital approach to self-knowledge is to question and examine one’s assumptions and expectations in a detached, non-compulsive manner. “Find out why you believe the things you do believe; examine the bases of your ideas.”

A sense of anti-climax is to be watched for. It may frequently be caused by the desirable disappointment of an undesirable expectation. You cannot be certain to be able to pin down the expectation which was incorrect, or even the assumption which makes you react in this manner. But you can observe yourself reacting in this way. This is an indispensable prerequisite for training to become really sensitive to essential impressions. It is called ‘watching.’ (26)

When faced with repetitive, deep-rooted thoughts it is important to neither indulge them, passively accept them or force them away – but simply let the emphasis go from the thought to observing it. “It is normal for the mind to produce thoughts. Be aware of your thoughts without getting lost in them. And if you get lost, notice that, too.”

Q: How can I free myself from the continual stream of agitated thoughts?

A: Simply observe their coming and going. Neither refuse them nor encourage them. In no way direct them. Remain impersonally alert. You will soon feel that thoughts, feelings and sensations appear in this directionless alertness, your openness. They exist only because you are, thus their appearing points to their home-ground, the real you. At first you will find that you keep interfering with your thoughts, suppressing or being taken by them. You do this because of the insecurity felt by an ego about to die, an isolated ego. But when you are free from the mental habits of activity and passivity you will find yourself in your natural quiet attention.

Q: So this natural state of attention does not mean I must be completely free from all thoughts?

A: It is not dependant on the absence of thought. It is that in which thoughts appear and disappear. It is “behind” thought. So don’t be violent or brutal with yourself in the hope of freeing yourself from agitation, but be clear-headed. In simple openness which is welcoming you will come to accept and get to know your negative feelings, desires and fears. Once welcomed in non-directed attention these feelings will burn themselves up, leaving only silence. Be alert, ready for

each and every appearing and you will soon find yourself the uninvolved spectator of your thoughts. Once this is an established fact, whether thoughts come to mind or not you will not be bound to them. (27)

Awareness illuminates the constant flow of thoughts that characterize our mental life. "We have to observe the mind and notice what it is doing. We have to notice how the mind produces swarms of self-centered thoughts, thus creating tension in the body."

All of us, without exception, have been thoroughly conditioned to react immediately to what is happening in and around us by thinking about it – talking to ourselves and others in judgmental ways, often repeating these thoughts over and over again. Thoughts evoke emotions, tensions, excitement, and stress, and can bring on exhaustion and sickness. Awareness reveals this simply to be so. Is it totally radical to just stop, look, listen, and experience what is actually taking place without immediately reacting with more thinking about it all? Can there be just a simple awareness, which means experiencing openly, innocently, this whole stream without getting caught up in thoughts about what is good, what could be better or perhaps worse? Awareness is not progressive; it illuminates *what is* without a sense of time, without self-separation. (28)

When people are conditioned or trained they will respond in a predictable way to emotional stimuli and input. "People will seek in greater quantity the things that touch them emotionally or which they like or are thrilled by. This is the barrier to surmount. It is crossed by observing it in action." Much of our behaviour is either a reaction to external influences or a self-imposed conditioning. "One's physical, emotional or psychic state of being is very much apt to be influenced by one's experience, mood or reaction at a particular time, under particular circumstances. The being is so closely knit that it is easy for an inner impact of one kind or another to have a greater influence on one's thinking, behaviour or reaction than another impact which comes from outside."

Emotions are usually more difficult to observe than thoughts because of their energetic power. Most people become completely identified with strong emotions, making it difficult to study them calmly and dispassionately:

An emotion usually represents an amplified and energized thought pattern, and because of its often overpowering energetic charge, it is not easy initially to stay present enough to be able to watch it. It wants to take you over, and it usually succeeds – unless there is enough presence in you. If you are pulled into unconscious identification with the emotion through lack of presence, which is normal, the emotion temporarily becomes "you." Often a vicious circle builds up between your thinking and the emotion: they feed each other. The thought pattern creates a magnified reflection of itself in the form of an emotion, and the vibrational frequency of the emotion keeps feeding the original thought pattern. By dwelling

mentally on the situation, event or person that is the perceived cause of the emotion, the thought feeds energy to the emotion, which in turn energizes the thought pattern, and so on. (29)

Feelings and emotions are usually expressed as pleasant or unpleasant. Struggling with an unpleasant emotion is an important method of self-observation and self-study. There is an adage: '*If you want to meet yourself, observe your thoughts and reactions under unusual circumstances.*'

In the sphere of the emotions it is very useful to try to struggle with the habit of giving immediate expression to all of one's unpleasant emotions. Many people find it very difficult to refrain from expressing their feelings about bad weather. It is still more difficult for people not to express unpleasant emotions when they feel that something or someone is violating what they may conceive to be order or justice. (30)

A good deal of energy is unnecessarily wasted on the expression of automatic and unpleasant emotions and in the habit of indulging in daydreams, memories and fantasies:

Energy is spent chiefly on unnecessary and unpleasant emotions, on the expectation of unpleasant things, possible and impossible, on bad moods, on unnecessary haste, nervousness, irritability, imagination, daydreaming and so on. Energy is wasted on perpetual chatter which absorbs an enormous amount of energy, on the 'interest' continually taken in things happening around us or to other people and having in fact no interest whatever. (31)

One of the most difficult tasks on the path of self-development is to overcome personal negative characteristics and endure the unpleasant manifestations of other people:

Q: I think that my worst fault is talking too much. Would trying not to talk so much be a good task?

A: For you this is a very good aim. You spoil everything with your talking. This talk even hinders your business. When you talk too much, your words have no weight. Try to overcome this. Many blessings will flow to you if you succeed. Truly, this is a very good task. But it is a big thing, not small.

Q: Would a good task be to endure the manifestations of others?

A: To endure the manifestations of others is a big thing. The last thing for a man. Only a perfect man can do this. Start by making your aim the ability to bear one manifestation of one person that you cannot now endure without nervousness. If you "wish," you "can." Without "wishing," you never "can." Wish is the most powerful thing in the world. With conscious wish everything comes. (32)

## Transcending Conditioned Behaviour

The impulses, emotional fixations and mental attitudes that characterize the secondary self have to be seen for what they are and treated accordingly. A saying of Rumi applies to this situation: '*The satiated man and the hungry one do not see the same thing when they look upon a loaf of bread.*'

The first self about which to attain knowledge is the secondary, essentially false, self which stands in the way, however useful it may be for many daily transactions. It must be set aside, made something which can be used or not used: not something which uses you. The way in which this is done is by self-observation: registering how and when this self is operating, and how it deceives. (33)

The secondary self needs to be recognized, identified and then transmuted, rather than suppressed or distorted. "The conditioned or immature self tends to control the learner, and makes further progress impossible until it has been brought into subjection, set aside or transformed."

What is today called conditioning is what used to be called habit patterns based on lower objectives. The Sufi method has never been to disturb these patterns, but rather to supply or make possible the development of a superior consciousness which would be able to perceive the habit and regulate its value. Once a person can really experience the value or otherwise, the relevance or otherwise, of a conditioned form of behaviour or thought, he or she will inevitably modify it. This is what we call 'polishing the mirror' in one of its aspects. If you have a scowl on your face, and this scowl has become a habit, and you do not know about it, or do know and do not know how to remove it, you will be in a different state when you can see it in a mirror. Instantaneously or bit by bit the reflection will do its job: coupled with the other things which you 'see in the mirror' – for within is the vision of what you could be like, sensed in an interior fashion. (34)

When individuals develop insight into the workings of their false personality they are more likely to interact with other people without automatically reacting to the egoistic and dysfunctional behaviour patterns of others. We then have the opportunity of not always responding to life events based on past conditioned patterns: "A person attacks you verbally, but instead of reacting to the insults, you see how upset and angry the person is, and you respond appropriately, perhaps by simply asking what is upsetting them."

Non-reaction to the ego of others is one of the most effective ways not only of going beyond ego in yourself but also of dissolving the collective human ego. But you can only be in a state of non-reaction if you can recognize someone's behaviour as coming from the ego, as being an expression of the collective human dysfunction. When you realize it's not personal, there is no longer a

compulsion to react as if it were. By not reacting to the ego, you will often be able to bring out the sanity in others, which is the unconditioned consciousness as opposed to the conditioned. At times you may have to take practical steps to protect yourself from deeply unconscious people. This you can do without making them into enemies. Your greatest protection, however, is being conscious. Somebody becomes an enemy if you personalize the unconsciousness that is the ego. Non-reaction is not weakness but strength. Another word for non-reaction is forgiveness. To forgive is to overlook, or rather to look through. You look through the ego to the sanity that is in every human being as his or her essence. (35)

Certain types of conditioning are useful and natural as long as they are not reactive or the result of a pattern of self-imposed conditioning. “What has to be done, as with any other input needed by the human being, is to regulate it (whether it be the desire for gain, the need to achieve) so that the necessary ‘space’ may be found.”

We are a very adaptable animal and we can do many different things. We are emotional, we can paint, we have arguments, we think, we are sometimes rational – but learning how to develop consciousness does not necessarily entail giving up these aspects of our nature, but *organizing them*. On this rests a fundamental insight of both modern and traditional psychologies, an insight that has not reached many of its students: our mental operating system is not one designed to act rationally in business, in our social and emotional life, so it does not allow us to simply “transcend” our material nature immediately; we must carry it along. We have many mental abilities, but they are basically designed for immediate survival in a chaotic world. It is a matter of understanding *which* of our needs needs to be satisfied at any one time, and *which* of our mental routines is useful at any moment. Certainly no one needs to give up those reactions useful to survival and the “normal” social conditioning that we need to get along in any society. *It is a matter of selecting and connecting them in the right way, each for the right kind of thinking.* Our minds are multiple, and we find it difficult to control the diverse mental abilities within. This ability to choose and direct the mental system is the most often unrealized of all ‘conscious development.’ (36)

The very process of observing our habitual patterns of behaviour, when carried out in an objective, non-judgmental manner, will in itself modify and transform these patterns:

Act in daily life according to your understanding. This is very important. Take note afterwards whether you have acted in a mechanical way. After you have noticed several times that you have reacted in a certain way, you will begin to catch yourself in the middle of the reaction and a time will come, you can be sure, when you are alert before you react. So don’t qualify your doing or condemn yourself. It’s enough just to see it. When you’ve seen it

you have taken the charcoal out of the fire. You have removed the fixed energy that holds your pattern. In simply being alert and welcoming, you are already living in your fullness. (37)

### **Self-Study in Esoteric Schools**

An esoteric school, in the form of a teacher and a group, is an instrument of ‘skilful means’ designed to provide a bridge between an individual or group and a higher order of knowledge. “The function of the Teaching is to exist among people and reawaken in them the capacity to spiritually develop themselves.” The methods applied in an esoteric school are subjective, taking into account the individual characteristics and peculiarities of each student. There is a saying: *‘To whomever has sense, a sign is enough. For the heedless, a thousand expositions are not enough.’*

In the Institute our weaknesses were observed and noted, and we were given opportunities of seeing them; and we had to see them for ourselves. Attention was necessary so as not to miss anything that was said or done. Apparently casual remarks or actions might reveal a great deal to a person. The teaching was given in fragments and often in unexpected ways, as we had to learn to put the pieces together and connect the fragments up with our own observations and experiences. (38)

A teacher will often point out examples of inappropriate individual and group behaviour that disturbs the higher learning process. “Although maladaptive behaviour abounds – narrow-mindedness, poor understanding, lack of generosity to others outside the ‘in-group,’ -- few people, it seems, realize that it is so widespread. Fewer still have bothered to see it as a matter of study.” A teacher may apply indirect and subtle methods to modify the student’s negative characteristics, following the dictum *‘what you like most may be what you need least, and what you least like may well be exactly what you need the most.’*

In esoteric schools, a teacher will divert students’ lower aspirations (greed, vanity) away from the spiritual area “by encouraging their disciples to channel the Commanding Self’s activities to any worthy worldly ambition; while continuing to study the Way in a modest and non-self-promoting way.”

It is often written within esoteric traditions that one does not build up the “ego.” or self, nor does one destroy it, but merely keeps it out of the area of the particular teaching. This is often termed “alignment.” It allows a full expression of the ordinary self, of reason and emotion in ordinary life. Here, then, is one pragmatic reason for the traditional separation of portions of esoteric instruction and practice from the remainder of a person’s social, emotional and professional life, the need for an area of human development to be kept “sacred,” away from the

reductionism of self-indulgence. This practice has been externally marked, in the past, by the designation of special “safe” places, cathedrals or temples; by the donning of special robes or hats or the like; and by such practices as leaving one’s shoes at the door of the temple. These practices are all intended to suggest that one should leave ordinary ideas and the ordinary self out of this situation. (39)

Students in esoteric schools are provided opportunities to understand and clarify their (often unconscious) motives and intentions. “Recrimination and self-criticism are not used; but people are expected to note the effects of allusions to their ‘hang-ups,’ so as to be able to dissolve them and hence gain access to their inner selves.”

The only remedy to mechanical, conditioned behaviour is to see that this is what you are doing, where you really are. Because people are not always in a condition to come to this realization by an act of will, traditional psychologies provide methods and materials in which there is the possibility of seeing oneself as one really is. The opportunity occurs again and again, through the nature of such a curriculum, and it takes many forms. (40)

Many exercises and study themes are designed to outwit the secondary self, which only thrives on smaller satisfactions. The wise have rightly taught: *‘The door of illumination is open to those for whom other doors are closed.’* The automatism of the normal human being is overcome, in the words of the Egyptian Sufi Dhun`Nun, by aiming for “being as you were, where you were, before you were.”

Illustrative stories are employed in schools of higher development to indicate barriers to learning, such as assumptions and preconceived attitudes. “The important thing is to be able to recognize what should be done and where it is indicated: not just to allow oneself to be pulled along by convention or other people’s assumptions.”

The story of the ‘real and artificial flowers,’ in one of its interpretations, shows the way to rethink a situation, and also how to put it into its proper area, and not to imagine that because people say that something is, say, spiritual, that it must therefore be so. Someone went to the public session of a wise man, with two bunches of flowers. He said: “One of these bunches is of real flowers; the other, made with the greatest cunning in China, is artificial. If you are as perceptive as you are supposed to be, I would like you to tell me which is which. But you must not hold them very close; you must not smell or touch them.” The sage said: “A wise question is met with a wise answer, a shallow one with a shallow reply. This, however, is a horticultural one – bring a hive of bees!” The bees, of course, chose the real flowers. (41)

## **Preparation for Higher Development**

Transformation to a higher state of being and development begins with self-knowledge and an honest, impartial appraisal of our human situation. Gurdjieff spoke of this in stark terms:

The study of the laws to which man is subject cannot be abstract like the study of astronomy; they can be studied only by observing them in oneself and *getting free of them*. At the beginning a man must simply understand that he is quite needlessly subject to a thousand petty but irksome laws which have been created for him by other people and by himself. When he attempts to get free from them he will see that he cannot. Long and persistent attempts to gain freedom from them will convince him of his slavery. The laws to which man is subject can only be studied by struggling with them, by trying to get free from them. But a great deal of knowledge is needed in order to become free from one law without creating for oneself another in its place. (42)

One of the purposes of a preparatory activity like self-observation is to enable people to understand themselves and their motivations, since people commonly try “to run before they can walk.” Most individuals resist attempts to objectively describe their current spiritual situation: “The statement ‘you need to do something else first’ is very often taken by the Commanding Self as a rejection or as a challenge, instead of it being taken for what it really is, a constructive and well-meant description of the other person’s current position and needs.” The dangers of grafting spiritual practices upon a raw unregenerate personality is illustrated by the story of the “Cannibals and the Missionary”:

A missionary who had been captured by cannibals was sitting in a cooking pot of rapidly heating water when he saw the cannibals with their hands clasped in prayer. He said to the nearest one: “So you are devout Christians?” “Not only am I a Christian,” replied the annoyed cannibal, “but I strongly object to being interrupted while saying grace!” The carrying out of automatic habits, of intellectual sophistries without a change in the person, or of emotional activities without deep perception acting upon the real self, cannot ever be the same as the experience of the mystic. If this tale is taken for a parable of trying to make someone rise to a higher state without transforming his lower aspects, it can also serve as a classical instance of the argument that human beings must clarify their personalities before they can attain certain desired levels. Let us call it the ‘incompatibility of co-existent tendencies in the individual.’ (43)

With the dawn of self-knowledge, a foundation of right orientation and discrimination begins to operate in the individual who embarks on the quest for mystical experience. “The seeker of transcendental states of mind may all too easily forget that their true attainment begins with the most profoundly mundane kinds of self-knowledge.”

An individual engaged in a spiritual quest can, by means of self-questioning, learn to discriminate between the fulfillment of lower socio-psychological needs and higher spiritual aims. The subjective self must first be prepared; only then is objective assessment possible. "The concept that anyone can embark on any kind of enquiry or study, irrespective of ability or preparation, has the solitary but not negligible defect that it simply does not work."

Would-be students of higher teachings must "sort themselves out" by examining themselves to see if their attempts at metaphysical study are really only used to fulfil lesser social or psychological desires. "It is the true discrimination between diversion and genuine aspiration which generally precedes the emergence of the capacity to learn."

In respect to higher teaching, the individual has to learn the difference between 'wants' and 'needs.' He can learn this only after basic teaching. When a child says that it needs something, it often means, until it understands the difference, that it 'wants' that thing. 'I need a lollipop' does not describe the situation at all. Only experience will show the difference between wants and needs. (44)

The process of self-examination precedes the stage at which the student can understand the corrective admonitions of a teacher. According to the Sufi Saadi: '*If you will not reprove yourself, you will not welcome reproof from another.*'

Until you can see yourself clearly and constantly for what you are really like, you will have to rely upon the assessment of a teacher, the gardener of Rumi's comparison: "A gardener going into an orchard looks at the trees. He knows that this one is a date, that one a fig, the other a pomegranate, a pear or an apple. To do this, he does not have to see the fruit, only the trees." (45)

Self-knowledge is a graduated process, difficult at the beginning, but slowly leading to an understanding of the deeper self. One of the teacher's duties is to supply the appropriate training to 'polish' and complete various facets of the student's personality:

The teacher's early function must be to alter the pattern of the novice's thinking and thus of his behaviour. If the novice's mind operates in a set way, dominated by prejudices and automatic responses of which he may not even be conscious, it interposes itself as a barrier between himself and the fact of the teacher, the activity of the teaching. In order for mind, intelligence, to become a channel for the teaching, it must be made aware, so it can seize on the multiplicity of truth and snap up the complexities of meaning. If the disciple follows his teacher's instructions, picks up his hints, reacts to the stimuli he provides, strange though these may be and tending in directions he cannot guess at, the aspirant will surely begin to break through the mental barriers, the rigidities, blocks and distortions, that previously hampered him and prevented his progress. (46)

The initial stages of breaking down long-established modes of thinking and patterns of behaviour may at first appear threatening and even destructive. In the Teaching it is said: '*Unless you are at first disintegrated, how can you be reintegrated?*'

By being forced to re-examine his values, his conceptions and perceptions of the world, the whole system of ideas that hitherto he has accepted as self-evident, the novice is levered out of his previous emotional and intellectual environment. It may have been one in which he felt secure, but that very security encourages in him precisely the kind of automatic thinking and behaviour that made any new self-knowledge impossible. By learning to question, at deeper and deeper levels, the reason for the actions he performs: and thus to understand what truly motivates him, who he really is, the disciple is slowly detached from the pointless, the uncreative or unworthy activities in which he may previously spent much of his time. The process is slow, step by step, action by action, insight by insight, as the aspirant makes his way forward. This cleansing process, as it might be called, is itself no more than a beginning, though it may take many years. (47)

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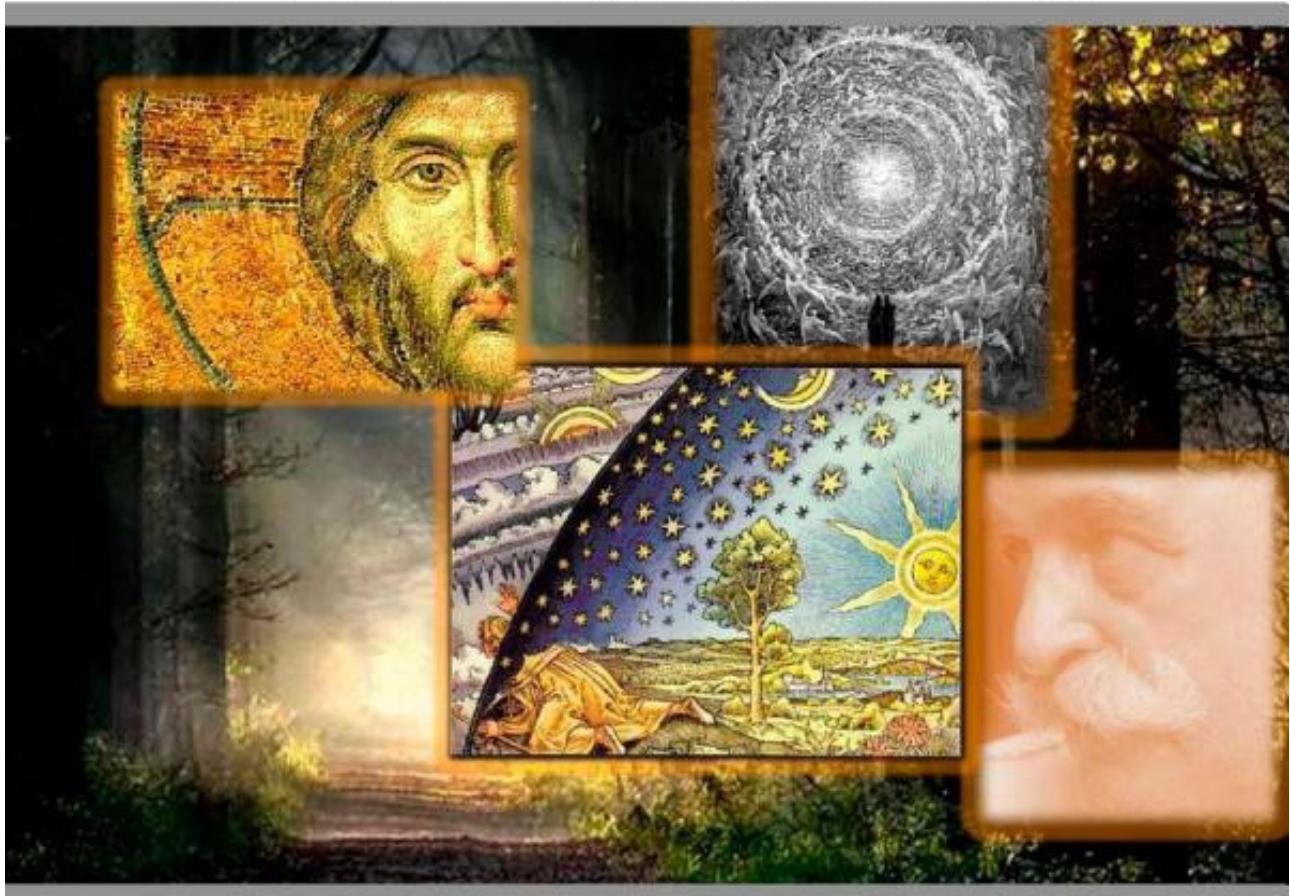
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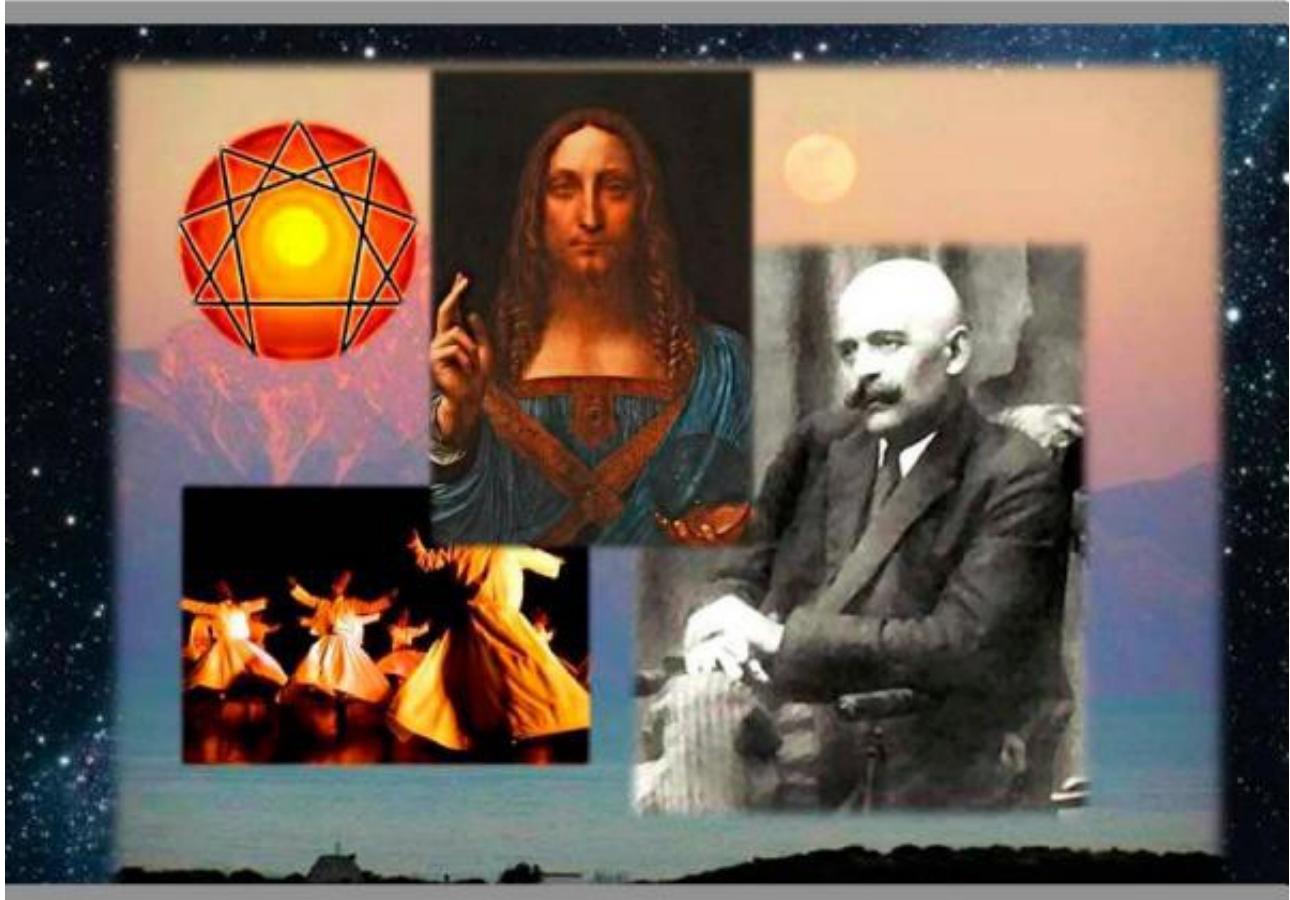
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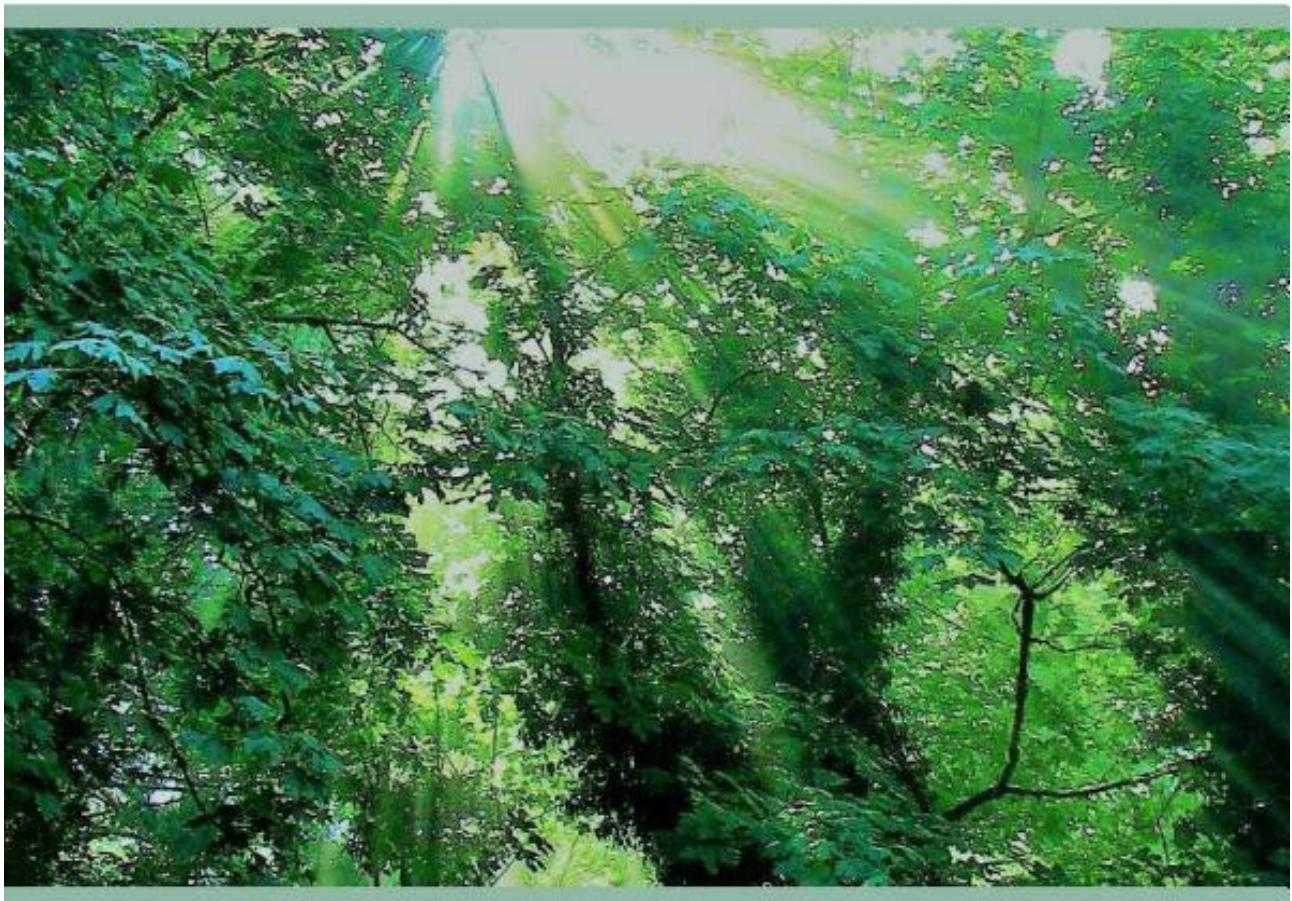
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